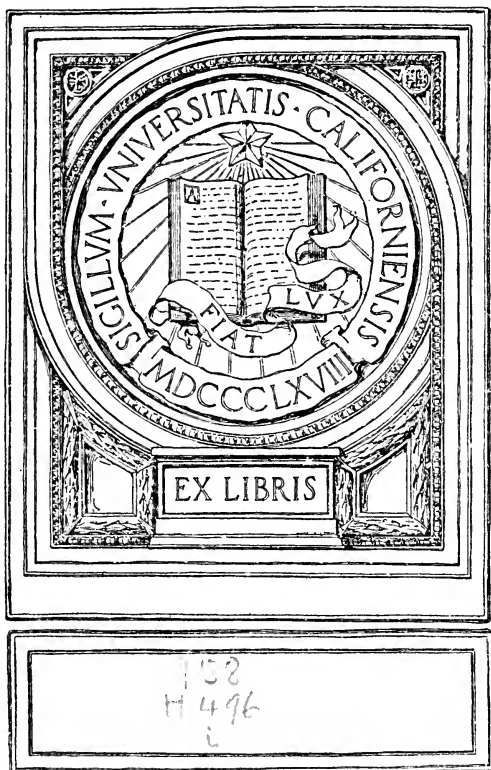


INTERPRETERS  
OF LIFE  
AND THE  
MODERN  
SPIRIT

ARCHIBALD  
HENDERSON













# Interpreters of Life and the Modern Spirit

*by* ARCHIBALD HENDERSON

LONDON  
DUCKWORTH AND CO.  
3 Henrietta Street, W. C.  
1911

*Printed by The Manhattan Press*  
*New York, U. S. A.*

To  
my Father and Mother,  
the Two  
who guided my first steps in the  
paths of literature, this venture  
into its wider fields is with all  
devotion dedicated.



## INTERPRETERS OF LIFE

George Meredith	I
Oscar Wilde	35
Maurice Maeterlinck	105
Henrik Ibsen	157
I. The evolution of his mind and art	159
II. The genesis of his dramas	243
George Bernard Shaw	285

*The frontispiece is a photogravure from an unpublished picture of George Meredith by Alvin Langdon Coburn.*





*GEORGE MEREDITH*

*"Then, ah! then . . . will the novelists' Art, now neither blushless infant nor executive man, have attained its majority. We can then be veraciously historical, honestly transcriptive. Rose-pink and dirty drab will alike have passed away. Philosophy is the foe of both, and their silly cancelling contest, perpetually renewed in a shuffle of extremes, as it always is where a phantasm falseness reigns, will no longer baffle the contemplation of natural flesh, smother no longer the soul issuing out of our incessant strife. Philosophy bids us to see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty drab; and that, instead of everlastingly shifting those barren aspects, the sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight. Do but perceive that we are coming to philosophy, the stride toward it will be a giant's—a century a day. And imagine the celestial refreshment of having a pure decency in the place of sham; real flesh; a soul born active, wind-beaten, but ascending."*

*George Meredith: Diana of the Crossways.*

## GEORGE MEREDITH

The celebration of the eightieth birthday of George Meredith, with its vast garland of appreciation from the leading men and women of letters of the English-speaking race, served but as a prelude to the veritable outburst of laudation, tribute, elucidation, and panegyric that followed his death. The belated efflorescence of the repute of George Meredith, this sudden twilight emergence from the shrine of submerged renown to the pedestal of clear fame, at first sight warrants the suspicion, and indeed quite patently provokes the question, as to whether the standard of literary taste in our time is not at last discovering in him a worthy guide and idealist. It is a neglected, rather than a forgotten, fact that the ideas prevailing at any particular period are of two distinct classes. On the one hand, there are the ideas which are in everybody's mind—the clamant topics of popular discussion, wide dissemination, and general acceptance. On the other hand, the really fertile and germinating ideas which

overleap the boundaries of the present and, being endowed with prophetic potency, herald and announce the future, are only known to a few, and are recognized by them as the ideas which the world must shortly be induced to ponder. Not ideas only, but standards of art and the laws of taste, furnish exemplification of this bipartite evolutionary phenomenon. The significant fact which arises most conspicuously in the examination of Meredith's career is the amazing disparity between his appreciation by the great minds of his age and his acceptance by the general public. The immense mass of critical literature touching his career, as poet, as novelist, as psychologist, as philosopher, as critic of society, spans the wide arc of more than half a century. And in this consideration, something very like wonder is excited, not that Meredith is not more generally popular, but that he is not the most widely read of all English novelists of the present day.

George Meredith has never lacked for the most edifying appreciation at the hands of the masters of his own craft. To call the roll of critics, novelists, poets, dramatists, men of exalted station in public life, who have acknowledged his mastery, heralded his greatness, paid him the supreme tribute of imitation, is to call the names of an overwhelming majority of the great English-speaking writers of his age. And yet withal, this pæan of acclaim has never intoxicated the public with the glamor of Mere-

dith's name, nor swung the "general reader" off his feet. If Meredith, in a life of eighty years unswervingly dedicated to the highest ideals of his art and with the enlightened support of the most brilliant and most solid minds of his time and race, could never succeed in reaching the heart and brain of that hypothetical, yet none the less real, "average man," there must lurk hidden away in the flower of his art some deadly canker of secret and devitalizing force. Or else, his bodily death but heralds the new life of his lasting fame.

## I

It is difficult to parry the conclusion that George Meredith's fame strengthens its claim upon posterity by reason of long delayed general acknowledgment. The educative influence of his fictive achievement, so arabesque, so fantastically kaleidoscopic, so ravishingly tortuous, yet withal so clear-visioned, so intense and so hardly sane, has been imperceptibly if glacially slow and sure. It is not too much to say that, in the large sense, the discrepancy between his general recognition and his deserts in the past, is to be explained by the fact that, certainly in ideal and purpose, he was ahead of, rather than behind, his age. He dreamed, scarcely hopefully, of a change in public taste wrought in part by the influence of

his example; and never wholly despaired of elevating the literary standards of that public he thanked God he had never written a word merely to please. His tutelage in self-discipline, his devotion to the law of the "stern-exact," and his fidelity to the instinctive integrity of his taste rather than to the clamor of popular authority, assured him a serene passage through the ordeal of public negligence and reprobation. In his own words:

"Ye that nourish hopes of fame!  
Ye who would be known in song!  
Ponder old History, and duly frame  
Your souls to meek acceptance of the thong.

"Lo! of hundreds who aspire  
Eighties perish—nineties tire!  
They who bear up, in spite of wrecks and wracks,  
Were seasoned by celestial hail of thwacks.

"Fortune in this mortal race  
Builds on thwackings for its base;  
Thus the All-Wise doth make a flail a staff,  
And separates his heavenly corn from chaff."

Meredith persevered heroically in the resolution to image life reflectively, to "paint man man, whatever the issue." And while we rejoice to-day in the consummation of the separation of the "heavenly corn" from the "chaff," the confession remains to be made that the "thwackings" were—oh! distinctly—"terrestrial." "If the gods showed their love

for Shelley by causing him to die young," remarks Mr. Trevelyan, "they have shown their love for Mr. Meredith in a more satisfactory manner, by leaving him to receive from us in old age the homage that was due to him from our grandfathers."

There is a passage in the chapter "At the Theatre" in *Rhoda Fleming*, which brings into sharpest light Meredith's opinion of the public. "It is a good public, that of Britain, and will bear anything, so long as villainy is punished . . . It was a play that had been favoured with a great run. Critics had once objected to it, that it was made to subsist on scenery, a song, and a stupid piece of cockneyism pretending to be a jest, that it was really no more than a form of slapping the public on the back. But the public likes to have its back slapped, and critics, frozen by the Medusa-head of Success, were soon taught manners. The office of critic is now, in fact, virtually extinct; the taste for tickling and slapping is universal and imperative; classic appeals to the intellect, and passions not purely domestic, have grown obsolete. There are captains of the legions, but no critics. The mass is lord." Meredith persistently scorned an air of easy familiarity with the public, and continued to make his "classic appeals to the intellect" and his evocations of "passions not purely domestic." Undismayed by the conviction that his immediate audience was apathetic if not actually antipathetic to his work, he pro-

duced book after book, marked by sanity of utterance, philosophic poise, and an artistic individuality which must needs ultimately compel recognition. His attitude toward the public, despite an early utterance or two, is one neither of condescending superiority nor of embittered disappointment, but rather of forthright recognition of the fact that the spirit of his thoughtful laughter has not found permanent lodgment in the British intelligence. "The English people know nothing about me," he said in 1905; "there always has been something antipathetic between them and me. With book after book it was always the same outcry of censure and disapproval. The first time or two I minded it. Since, I have written to please myself." In the America which gave the world a Howells and a James, and which produced a Mrs. Wharton and a Mrs. Atherton for Meredith's delectation, he found a more generally congenial and appreciative audience; and only a few months before his death he said, "They have always liked me better in America. They don't care about me in England." Significant, indeed, is the circumstance that those two brilliant and whimsical exemplars of Celtic wit, paradox, fantasy and imagination—radical, rationalistic, and *intransigent*—George Meredith and George Bernard Shaw—found their first real general recognition and appreciation, neither in the land of adoption nor nationality, but in a land upon which they had never



set foot. America anticipated England in her appreciation of Wagner, as to-day it outranks England in appreciation of Ibsen; and the catholicity of American taste finds further verification in its saner, more balanced general appreciation of George Meredith.

## II

Ibsen's reply to the charge that his *Peer Gynt* was not poetry is historic. "My book *is* poetry," he wrote to Georg Brandes in 1867, "and if it is not, then it will be. The conception of poetry in our country, in Norway, shall be made to conform to the book." Whilst such a defiance is wholly alien to Meredith's spirit, it is nevertheless true that he based his hopes upon the alteration of public taste in regard to the function and art of fiction. To the author of an article in the *Harvard Monthly* he wrote, "When at the conclusion of your article on my works you say that a certain change in public taste, should it come about, will be to some extent due to me, you hand me the flowering wreath I covet. For I think that all right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave ways for the firmer footing of those who succeed us; and as to my works, I know them faulty, think them of worth only when they point and aid to that end. Close

knowledge of our fellows, discernment of the laws of existence, these lead to great civilization. I have supposed that the novel exposing and illustrating the history of man helps us to such sustaining roadside gifts." Meredith's purpose is to dilate the imagination, to "arouse the inward vision" to a recognition of the possibilities and limitations of human character, and upon such recognition to base veracious records of contemporary existence.

It is now many years since Thomas Hardy first said that the novel had taken a turn for analyzing, rather than depicting, character and emotion. The contemporary reader is no longer allowed to cherish the comfortable feeling that a novel is a novel as a pudding is a pudding, in Mr. Henry James's phrase, and that our only business with it would be to swallow it! Physical, material action no longer usurps the position of primary interest; the casual and adventitious play rôles of decreasing, and ever-decreasing, importance; and the "story," once thought supreme, has come to occupy a subsidiary place in a fiction concerned less with actual events than with the subtle, and indescribably complex, motives and impulses which prompt to action. Even passion, if unanimated by thought, or undirected by intelligent choice, ceases to hold the attention of the world as formerly: the soul has her histories as well as the body. "A psychological reason is, to my imagination, an object adorably pictorial," says Mr. Henry

James, "to catch the tints of its complexion, I feel as if that idea might inspire one to Titianesque effects. There are few things more exciting to me, in short, than a psychological reason." Throughout Meredith's entire work it is the "conscience residing in thoughtfulness" to which he consistently appeals.

There is one remark of Meredith's which seems to contain the germ of his philosophy of fiction, or perhaps it would be equally accurate to say, his fiction of philosophy. "Narrative is nothing. It is the mere vehicle of philosophy. The interest is in the idea which action serves to illustrate." In this statement are contained both a challenge and a confession. When someone charged Zola with transgressing the prerogative of the novelist in imbuing his fictive product with design, he haughtily replied, "I have, in my estimation, certain contributions to make to the thought of the world on certain subjects, and I have chosen the novel as the best means of communication. To tell me that I must not do so is nonsense. I claim it as my right, and who are you to gainsay it?" Not the least significant of Meredith's claims to high consideration is his faith in, and practice of, the doctrine that Art without Thought is dead. Romance alone gives us idealization of life unfortified by the realities of every-day existence. Realism alone presents the epidermis of reality, exhibiting facts unilluminated by the reasoning spirit. The function of the artist, in Meredith's

view, is to inform his narrative with thought, that is, to give consistent directive emphasis—cultural, ethical, psychological, social—to his composition. To Meredith, art is analytic rather than descriptive, interpretative rather than narrative. To hold the kodak up to nature is a task accomplished automatically by every shop window on Broadway. To integrate concepts, to envelop facts with truth, to enlarge narrative through selective emphasis—this, indeed, is the glory as well as the responsibility of the fictive artist of the future. Bernard Shaw has averred that fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective means of moral influence in the world, excepting only the example of personal conduct; and he waives even this exception in favor of the art of the stage, “because it works by exhibiting examples of personal conduct made intelligible and moving to crowds of unobservant, unreflecting people to whom real life means nothing.” Whilst Meredith does not look upon fiction merely as a Zolaesque instrument of moral propagandism, he seeks to “render events as consequent to your understanding as a piece of logic, through an exposure of character.” “The fiction which is the summary of actual life . . .,” says Meredith, “is philosophy’s elect handmaiden;” and he would animate fiction with the fires of positive brainstuff, in order to raise the Art of Fiction to a level with History. “Brainstuff is not lean stuff; the brainstuff of fiction is internal his-

tory. The forecast may be hazarded that if we do not speedily embrace Philosophy in fiction the Art is doomed to extinction under the shining multitude of its professors. They are fast capping the candle. Instead, therefore, of objurgating the timid intrusions of Philosophy, invoke her presence, I pray you. History without her is the skeleton map of events. Fiction a picture of figures modelled on no skeleton-anatomy. But each, with Philosophy to aid, blooms and is humanly shapely. To demand of us truth to nature, excluding Philosophy, is to bid a pumpkin caper."

The strength of Meredith's position is the result of his hardy sanity in struggling against both the extravagant blandishments of idealism and the morbid fascinations of realism. If at times he mounts the Hippogriff and soars lightly away to roseate regions of air, it is but a momentary prank of the Celtic troll, flirting with the Dæmon of the Epoch. If at other times his justice, untempered by mercy, wrings our hearts as if with purposed cruelty, it is not the naturalistic "mutilation of humanity," bitterly complained of by Brunetière, but a hardy lesson in the practice of self-mastery, through which his characters masterfully find themselves. Uniting within himself the romantic instinct with the realistic sense, passion for form with genius for psychology, Meredith early made the discovery that fiction must be neither mere fanciful narration nor realistically ob-

jective elaboration, but rational, clear-visioned interpretation of the facts and materials of existence. He has paid to the full the penalty for his faith that fiction is more instructive than life.

### III

"Narrative is nothing. It is the mere vehicle of philosophy. The interest is in the idea which action serves to illustrate." In this significant passage already cited is embodied a plea of "confession and avoidance." As I have already shown, Meredith here clearly indicates the purposive note of his fiction. More than this, he baldly states that "narrative is nothing." By this, I take it he means he is concerned only incidentally with the "story"; but I am also inclined to believe that the statement involves an admission on his part that he is not a born story-teller. Oscar Wilde, who admired Meredith extravagantly and clearly shows his influence, was driven to say in a passage of genuine insight, "As a writer, he has mastered everything except language; as a novelist, he can do everything except tell a story; as an artist, he is everything except articulate." One-sided as is such an appraisal, it lays bare the essential weakness of Meredith: that he is at the beck and under the sway of his own temperament.

Meredith scorns to be that "story-teller whose art excites an infant to serious attention," despite his recognition that such a story-teller succeeds best with the crowd. He even goes so far as to maintain that "unless we have a perpetual whipping of the tender part of the reader's mind, interest in invisible persons must needs flag." But behind all this declaration of purpose lies the unconscious admission that his most vital deficiency is in the natural and spontaneous gift of simple and powerful narration. And he has in one place, certainly, openly fallen back upon the resource of detached self-expression as vindication of his failure as narrator pure and simple. "We will make no mystery about it," he says in *Beauchamp's Career*. "I wish I could. Those happy tales of mystery are as much my envy as the popular narratives of the deeds of bread-and-cheese people, for they both create a tideway in the attentive mind; the mysterious pricking our credulous flesh to creep, the familiar urging our obese imagination to constitutional exercise. And oh, the refreshment there is in dealing with characters either contemptibly beneath us or supernaturally above! My way is like a Rhone island in a summer drought, stony, unattractive and difficult between the two forceful streams of the unreal and over-real, which delight mankind—honour the conjurors! My people conquer nothing, win none; they are actual, yet uncommon. It is the clockwork of the brain that

they are directed to set in motion, and—poor troop of actors to vacant benches!—the conscience residing in thoughtfulness which they would appeal to; and if you are there impervious to them, we are lost: back I go to my wilderness, where, as you perceive, I have contracted the habit of listening to my own voice more than is good.”

#### IV

The real difficulty in criticism and appreciation of a literary artist at once critical and creative is to draw the delicate and subtle distinctions between his expressed ideal and his actual achievement. To what extent, for instance, does Meredith actually put into practice the principles he advocates with such charming reasonableness? To what extent is he true to nature in informing his fiction with that “philosophy” to which he persists in attributing such miraculous powers? The clue is found, simply enough, in Meredith’s claim that the brainstuff of fiction is *internal* history. The desiderated “philosophy” is the instrument for reading this internal history aright. That is to say, Meredith not unnaturally wishes to see fiction written in the light of deep and penetrating comprehension of the fundamental realities of human nature.



Character must be shown in consistent development, men and women must be shown struggling upward toward the light through the transmutative ordeals of human experience. So, after all, the primary consideration is Meredith's conception of the nature of humanity and of the forces which must operate in achieving individual and spiritual emancipation. The epitome of his fiction is personal history, a soul on trial, characters fused in the hot crucible of life—the vicissitudes, failures and struggles of the individual to arrive at self-realization and self-mastery.

Meredith's point of departure in any confession of faith is the belief that Earth is man's true mother,

"His well of earth, his home of rest,  
And fair to scan."

Earth has her brightest life in the works of man, and from her man derives his spiritual qualities. "We do not get to any Heaven by renouncing the Mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations." He asks no selfish, extravagant boons of Nature, desires only that he may read her aright and see "stern joy her origin." He is content to acknowledge that

“He may entreat, aspire,  
He may despair, and she has never heed.  
She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,  
Not his desire.”

Alongside Meredith's faith in Nature comes his confidence in the efficiency and validity of rationalistic process. Like Bernard Shaw, he believes that “to life, the force behind the man, intellect is a necessity, for without it he blunders into death.” Faith in Nature, undirected by thought, may well lead us astray. Instinctive temperament, fortified by genuine passion but guided by clear-eyed intelligence, will enable man to rise nobly to the heights of his possibilities. Brain, blood and spirit are the indissoluble trinity, three in one, and one in three, of the Meredithian perfect man:

“Each of each in sequent birth  
Blood and brain and spirit.”

Such a conception—of the “temperament of common sense fired by enthusiasm and controlled by humor”—makes comprehensible to us at once his definition of passion as noble thought on fire. And in Meredith's fictive histories the hero totters and tumbles because he obeys one of the constituent forces to the neglect or exclusion of the others. The soul is co-existent with, and in a sense the interaction of, brain and blood. And the man who can assert

"I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul."

is he who can say, as does one of Meredith's own characters, "I am not to follow any impulse that is not the impulse of all my nature—myself altogether."

This is Meredith's clue to the progressive evolution of society. "Man may be rebellious against his time and his laws, but if he is really for nature, he is not lawless." In his novels, Meredith portrays the epic encounter perpetually waged between Man in his instinctive temperament and the laws, institutions and traditions which the majority at any given epoch accept for their governance in mutual relationship. And at the beginning of the nineteenth chapter of *One of Our Conquerors* he says, "There is at times in the hearts of all men of active life a vivid wild moment or two of dramatic dialogue between the veteran antagonists Nature and Circumstance, where they, whose business it should be to be joyfully one, furiously split; and the Dame is up with her shrillest querulousness to inquire of her offspring for the distinct original motive of his conduct . . . If he be not an alienated issue of the Great Mother, he will strongly incline to her view, that he put himself into harness with a machine going the dead contrary way of her welfare and thereby wrote himself a donkey for his present

reading . . . But it is asked by the disputant, If we had followed her exclusively, how far should we have travelled from our starting-point? We of the world and its prizes and duties must do her an injury to make her tongue musical to us, and her argument worthy of our attention!"

## V

Noteworthy consequences flow from Meredith's insistence upon his two main doctrines:—"philosophical" contemplation of human nature, and allegiance to Mother Earth. First, as I have pointed out above, narrative is subsidiary to character analysis; and the characters themselves are the slaves, not the creators of this analysis. In Meredith, there is always an *arrière pensée*. He is driven by the lash of his purpose; and events must perforce shape themselves to the promulgation of his thesis. In that admirable narrative *Rhoda Fleming*, there must be a freak of the money demon in the person of Anthony Hackbut in order to provide for Rhoda's crying need for financial aid. In *Evan Harrington*, all things must work unremittingly for Evan's elevation to that social position as a "gentleman" to which his natural qualities so eminently entitle him. In *Richard Feverel*, the hero must break Lucy's

heart in vindication of a false sense of honor, that the "system" may be utterly condemned in the spectacle of its fair young victim. Lætitia Dale must stultify the soul of her pure integrity for the personal redemption of the male egoist. And what a revenge did facts take upon Meredith for that criminal libel upon the character of Diana Warwick in the sale of the secret! In a word, Meredith is a master-magician—with a wave of his wand moving his characters hither and thither to do the bidding of his presuppositions. There is something here of that "dramatic algebra" complained of in Lessing: when all the factors on each side of the equation have cancelled out, the problem is solved. Meredith's characters seem uninformed with that interior logic which should solve the problems of their character and destiny: they are set in motion and must respond to the clock-work of Meredith's *idée fixe*. They often behave most unaccountably, not because they are human beings and so subject to vagary, idiosyncrasy and whim, but because they must follow, willy nilly, the strange and intricate functionings of the brain of George Meredith.

In the second place, Meredith's faith in the nourishing and sanctifying attributes of Nature certainly tends to no spiritual elevation of his characters. They are enmeshed in the coils of their own personal and immediate interests. They never escape from the immediate implications of self. They make

strange gestures of fantastic and ensnaring charm; but it is always the recital of a secular legend at which we are asked to assist. With one or two unrepresentative exceptions, Meredith's memorable characters have no wide expanse of outlook, no extent of horizon, no real concern for others. Intent upon the problem of self, vividly introspective and self-analytic, they have no concern for humanity at large, or for the wider destiny of things. The decisive quality, the absolute *differentia* of the Meredithian novel is that the characters are shown acting and reacting in relation solely to a given series of events, never in any large human relation to the world. Thus Meredith differs fundamentally from Jane Austen, who, while exhibiting characters in a circumscribed setting, shows them against the background of the world. With Meredith, love, for example, seems to be a clean and healthy reaction of the body, with a basis in common-sense, rather than an instrument or manifestation of the interior life. He is almost savage in his denunciation of the sentimentalist, "fiddling harmonics on the sensual strings"; and sentiment he objurgates as the giant illusion, deceptive, ensnaring, nugatory. And yet, as a new model, he exhibits love as the inspiration of juvenile incoherence, complex self-concern, or prosaic directness, rather than as an outflowing from the secret rootage of the soul. In an age which originated in humanitarian feeling and bids fair to

retain the title of the age of altruism, Meredith is an anachronism. His characters recede further and further back into the Victorian age. With all the subtlety and sharpened vision of the future, they have only the horizon of the past.

## VI

Certain restrictions are inevitably imposed upon the artist, by his temperament, his attitude toward his art, and his philosophy of life. Meredith's avowed purpose of minting and putting into active circulation the gold of the philosopher carries with it the obligation to remove from the characters the stigma of abstract theory by means of vital and essentially human treatment. In *Sandra Belloni*, he has, as is his practice, gone about disarming his critics, on this very point. "Such is the construction of my story . . . that to entirely deny the Philosopher the privilege he stipulated for when with his assistance I conceived it, would render our performance unintelligible to that acute and honourable minority which consents to be thwacked with aphorisms and sentences and a fantastic delivery of the verities. While my Play goes on, I must permit him to come forward occasionally. We are indeed in a sort of part-

nership, and it is useless for me to tell him that he is not popular and destroys my chance". It is a curious, an almost tragic, limitation of Meredith's art that the vitality, the verisimilitude of the characters is, perhaps not infrequently, in inverse ratio to the abstractness of the theory which they are set in motion to exemplify. For example, it is only after one becomes accustomed to the grotesque jargon of Sir Willoughby Patterne that one accepts him with any equanimity. Clara's return from the station, utterly unnatural and psychologically indefensible as it is, brings her once more into the magic circle of conflict, whence she is fraudulently removed by the *deus ex machina* of the enforced-eavesdropper, Crossjay. Renée opportunely appears always for one purpose—not to exhibit her own character—but merely to throw into high relief the fatal insubstantiality of Nevil Beauchamp and his fore-ordained doom to failure. These examples suffice. One often feels that instead of opening a window into the soul, Meredith has merely opened a case-ment of his own brain. The rattling of the machinery of this dexterous contriver persists in making itself audible, charm he never so wisely.

Meredith is incapable of final artistic self-sacrifice: he cannot resist the fascination of the rôle of ideal spectator. He ravishes us often with his sense of the ironic contrast between the logic of the situation and the exhibition of the human will; but



he cannot spare us the intrusion of his own charming self. Quaint, fantastic, original, he interposes between the reader and his creations the viewless barrier of his own personality. His characters are unusual because, by some subtle alchemy of the fictive art, they assume the color of his own temperament. He persists in utterly destroying the illusion of objectivity. He ruthlessly speaks *in propria persona* when there is no occasion for it. We are forever knocking our heads against that everlasting signpost I. And that partner of his, the Philosopher—though we may not object to his wholesome ideas—is personally a clever fellow, but a rank intruder.

## VII

All discussion of Meredith unerringly leads to consideration of his style. Here it is almost as easy to sin on the side of praise as to err on the side of reprobation. Meredith is a giant in verbal potentiality—whose Achilles' heel is preciousness. One moment, he uses the metaphorical to avoid the long-winded (an expression of his own); the next, he stops to dally at interminable length with elucidative panegyric over an epigram. Like the Countess de Saldar, he rambles concentrically. His characters speak in eloquent pauses. The reader must fill in

the blanks. As with Renée, "thought flew, tongue followed, and the flush of meaning quivered over them like night-lightning". A rapid phraser, like his own Mrs. Mountstuart, Meredith detests the analysis of his sentence: "it had an outline in vagueness, and was flung out to be apprehended, not dissected". And yet what novelist of the day but Meredith would wax dithyrambic for twenty pages over the *tournure* of a leg, as in *The Egoist*; or would conclude a chapter with this exquisitely minute description of a woman's (Clara Middleton) hair: "He placed himself at a corner of the doorway for her to pass him into the house, and doated on her cheek, her ear, and the softly dusky nape of her neck, where this way and that the little lighter-coloured irreclaimable curls running truant from the comb and the knot—curls, half-curls, root-curls, vine-ringlets, wedding-rings, fledgeling feathers, tufts of down, blown wisps—waved or fell, waved over or up or involutedly, or strayed, loose and downward, in the form of small silken paws, hardly any of them much thicker than a crayon shading, cunninger than long round locks of gold to trick the heart"! With a touch of self-revelation, he advises the younger generation of writers "to be largely epigrammatic, rather than exuberant in diction"; yet he errs equally at either extreme. In Meredith's case, the fear of the commonplace is the beginning, less of wisdom, than of complexity; and

his horror of the obvious gives rise to an idiosyncrasy for the incoherent. Pictures flutter through his brain with all the blinding dazzle of the kinetoscope; and his stereoscopic imagination is continually projecting successive figures of rarely stimulating suggestiveness. No modern novelist is comparable to Meredith for realizing subtle and complex sensations and emotions through employment of the most perfectly objective images. His verbal genius delights in "lighting up candelabras in the brain" which, dazzling, obscure as often as they clarify.

Meredith takes an almost unholy delight in subtle *maniment des phrases*; he is a specialist in verbal manipulation. In his effort to escape the banal, he achieves the artificial as often as the suggestive. His women "swim" swanlike through his pages; in anger, their "aspects spit"; in joy, they "eye" you "a faint sweetness". And yet these strange, aquatic damsels aphorize like the profoundest of French philosophers. A cordial greeting takes this fantastic form, "Victor's festival lights were kindled, beholding her; cressets on the window-sill, lamps inside". Searching Clara's eyes, Willoughby "found the man he sought there, squeezed him passionately, and let him go . . ." And Clara's horrified divination of Willoughby's imminent demonstration of affection takes this vivid expression: "the gulf of a caress hove in view like an enormous billow hollowing under the curled ridge. She stooped to a buttercup,

the monster swept by". Without extending the catalogue needlessly, suffice it to say that Meredith is the sport of his own wanton fancy, sometimes startling in the intense vividness of his evocation, and again comical in his infelicitous groping after felicity.

It is Meredith's great achievement that, despite his theoretical divagations, his extraneous philosophical observations, his inability to resist the temptation to speak through the mouths of his fictitious personages, his faculty of unconsciously imparting to them the tone and hue of his own nature, his characters live with a mobile energy drenched with thought for which we have to go to Ibsen to find a parallel. Meredith enjoys in exceptional degree the dramatic genius for situation. His novels, however, are not organic units, but *centos* of dramatic conjunctures. How many chapters in his works are "acts" in the drama, how many scenes are "curtains" in the evolution of the dramatic conflict! How little story, how much psychological duel! He always sees his characters "in a situation". And it is because he sees them thus vividly, that he is oblivious to the structural form of the narrative. His characters tend to crystallization into types; and from each one of his novels a thesis may easily be disengaged. Meredith is a Celtic Molière cursed with Marivaudage. His Welsh hereditament is ability to discern

and describe subtle feelings with objectively realistic subtlety. And his philosophical acumen is softened by the intuition and imaginative insight of the lyric poet. His inspiration, says Mrs. M. Sturge Henderson, "appears to lie in his poetic grasp, the intensity of realization with which he holds to the main issue and keeps it living, in defiance of the tangles of complexity he is forever weaving every side of it, and which might have been expected to prove fatal to the life within".

## VIII

Meredith's attitude as a critic of society, finding concrete exemplification in his novels, is philosophically exhibited in that contemporary classic, the *Essay on Comedy*. Meredith occupies the middle ground of sanity between the complacent adherent of current institutions and the violent Utopist, who desires to shatter this sorry scheme of things *entire*. In his novels, he "throws no infamous reflection upon life"; the Comic Spirit, as he portrays it, is in direct opposition to cynicism. Mr. Gilbert Chesterton maintains that to-day when we want any art tolerably brisk and bold, we have to go to the doctrinaires. Meredith is wholly out of sympathy with the social doctrinaires, those popular writers, conscious of fatigue in creativeness, who "desire to be

cogent in a modish cynicism: perversions of the idea of life, and of the proper esteem for the society we have wrested from brutishness, and would carry higher". It is quite clear that Meredith, with all his passion for improving social conditions, his desire to place woman on an equality with man, to establish a more rational basis for the institution of marriage, wishes to build upon the foundations of our present social structure. His plea is for alterations and modifications of social conditions on the basis of hardly won reforms, and not for construction of a new social fabric after destruction of the old. His remark about the Comic Poet is perfect in its application to himself: "He is not concerned with beginnings or endings or surroundings, but with what you are now weaving. To understand his work and value it, you must have a sober liking of your kind and a sober estimate of our civilized qualities". Like his own Comic Poet, he believes that English civilization is founded on common sense, and that it is the first condition of sanity to believe it. In this broad sense is Meredith the true conservative. The function of Comedy, in his eyes, is not the destruction, but the evolutionary sublimation of established morals.

For his finely considered, shall we say chivalrous, espousal of the cause of woman in contemporary society, Meredith enjoys the reputation of being in advance of his age. It would be difficult to dem-

onstrate that Meredith has shot beyond the really progressive thought of to-day, though it may well be granted that present ideas of woman owe something to his championship. The problem stands in clearer view from the rays of light he casts upon it from so many sides, and through the prisms of so many individualities. Meredith's novels go far to correct the predatory male's conception of woman embodied in Sir Austin Feverel's provocative epigram, "I expect that woman will be the last thing civilized by man". Meredith's ground stone of faith is the belief that in excellencies, if not in capacities, woman is man's full equal. Far from accentuating woman's intuition at the expense of man's logic, Meredith insists that woman has a brain—intricate, involute, fertile. And he is convinced that the brains of woman can be "helpful to the hitherto entirely dominant muscular creature who allowed them some degree of influence in return for servile flatteries and the graceful undulations of the snake—admired yet dreaded". Woman is what she is largely through the shaping influence of man's tyranny. Women are "of mixed essences shading off the divine to the considerably lower"; and woman will find herself only when these mixed essences are allowed free distillation in untrammelled intercourse with man. "Women have us back to the conditions of primitive man", says Meredith in *The Egoist*, "or they shoot us higher than the topmost star. But it is as

we please. Let them tell us what we are to them: for us they are the back and front of life: the poet's Lesbia, the poet's Beatrice; ours is the choice—they are to us what we hold of best or worst within". In a word, to man is entrusted the future destiny of woman. Not until man has removed the constraint put upon her natural aptitudes, and freed her from the necessity for "recourse to particular arts, feline chiefly, to make her way in the world", will she freely differentiate, take on individuality, and exhibit that highest *ewig weibliche* which is the key to her nature. The ideal image of the heroical feminine type for the worship of mankind is an image "as yet in poetic outline only on our upper skies".

Despite all the restrictions and reservations that flood the mind during a critical survey of the novels, it must be said, without restriction or reservation, that Meredith is a very great novelist and psychologist, more distinctive than distinguished, more individual than representative, more intellectual than passionate, more fantastical than natural, more dramatic than poetic, more realistic than romantic. No *Bahnbrecher* in thought, he yet reads with piercing vision the heart of nature's secrets, and flashes lightning rays of conviction into the very depths of human consciousness. "He has brought to man," as M. Firmin Roz has so adequately said, "some old truths shaped in a rejuvenated gospel that makes them seem to be but newly conceived. And in fact



they are new, since they face the light in a new age, and one were at a loss how to distinguish them, except by the most artificial of abstractions, from the radiant intelligence which, in truth, does not merely accompany them, but inheres in them and impresses them upon us. It is only by means of that illumination that we see clearly for the first time the things which have always been before our eyes without attracting our attention; it is by means of it that we at last understand, that we know”.



*OSCAR WILDE*

*"I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring; I made art a philosophy and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colours of things: there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder. I took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made of it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet; at the same time I widened its range and enriched its characterization. Drama, novel, poem in prose, poem in rhyme, subtle or fantastic dialogue, whatever I touched, I made beautiful in a new mode of beauty: to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction. I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me. I summed up all systems in a phrase and all existence in an epigram."*

*De Profundis.*

*Wilde's Works. Authorized Edition.*

*Vol. XI., pp. 45-46.*

## OSCAR WILDE

In this age of topsy-turvydom—the age of Nietzsche, Shaw, Carroll, Wilde, Chesterton—criticism masquerades in the garb of iconoclasm; and fancy, fantasy, caprice and paradox, usurp the rôles of scholarship, realistic valuation, and the historic sense. The ancient and honorable authority of the critic is undermined by the complacent scepticism of the period. And the gentle art of appreciation is only the individual filtration of art through a temperament. The mania for certitude died with Renan, confidence had its last leader in Carlyle, and authority relinquishes its last and greatest adherent in the recent death of Brunetière. The ease of blasphemy and the commercialization of audacity are accepted facts; we have lost the courage and simplicity for the expression of the truth unvarnished and unadorned. “We know we are brilliant and distinguished, but we do not know that we are right. We swagger in fantastic artistic costumes; we praise ourselves; we fling epigrams right and left; we have the courage to play the egotist, and the courage to

play the fool, but we have not the courage to preach." The symbol of art is no longer a noble muse, but only a tricky jade. Criticism, once the art of imaginative interpretation, is now mere self-expression—the adventures of a soul among masterpieces. We are expected to believe that the greatest pictures are those in which there is more of the artist than the sitter. The *stigmata* of current criticism are well expressed by a brilliant Frenchman—Charles Nodier, was it not?—in the opinion that if one stops to inquire into the probabilities, he will never arrive at the truth!

The world has never seen an age in which there was more excuse for questioning the validity of contemporary judgment. It would be the height of folly to expect posterity to authenticate the vaporings of an appreciation which, in shifting its stress from the universal to the *personnel*, has changed from criticism into colloquy, from clinic into *causerie*. Indeed, it is nothing less than a truism that the experience of the artist in all ages, according to the verdict of history, is identical with itself. In the words of Sidney Lanier: ". . . the artist shall put forth, humbly and lovingly, the very best and highest that is within him, utterly regardless of contemporary criticism. What possible claim can contemporary criticism set up to respect—that criticism which crucified Jesus Christ, stoned Stephen, hooted Paul for a madman, tried Luther for a criminal, tortured

Galileo, bound Columbus in chains, drove Dante into exile, made Shakspeare write the sonnet, 'When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes', gave Milton five pounds for 'Paradise Lost', kept Samuel Johnson cooling his heels on Lord Chesterfield's doorstep, reviled Shelley as an unclean dog, killed Keats, cracked jokes on Gluck, Schubert, Beethoven, Berlioz and Wagner, and committed so many other impious follies and stupidities that a thousand letters like this could not suffice even to catalogue them?"

It was Mr. Bliss Perry who charmingly revealed to us the shades and nuances of literary fashion. And yet—the *dicta* of literary cliques, the voice of literary predilection, often ring false to the ears. The verdict of the *intellectuels* is a veritable stumbling block in the path of genius. "It is from men of established literary reputation," asserts Bernard Shaw, "that we learn that William Blake was mad; that Shelley was spoiled by living in a low set; that Robert Owen was a man who did not know the world; that Ruskin is incapable of comprehending political economy; that Zola is a mere blackguard, and Ibsen is Zola with a wooden leg. The great musician accepted by his unskilled listener, is vilified by his fellow musician. It was the musical culture of Europe which pronounced Wagner the inferior of Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer."

It is not enough to say, with the brilliant author

of *Contemporains*, that contemporary criticism is mere conversation; it is often little more than mere gossip. One is often inclined to question, with Lowell, whether the powers that be, in criticism, are really the powers that ought to be. Especially is this true of a time uniquely characterized by its tendency to relentless rehabilitation. No diabolical sinner in literary history is now safe in his grave. He is in perpetual danger of being the innocent victim of our pernicious habit of sainting the unsainted, of saving the damned. The immoral iconoclast of a former age becomes the saintly anarch of this. The jar of lampblack is exchanged for a bucket of white-wash; and in this era of renovation the soiled linen of literary sinners emerges translucent and immaculate from the presses of the critical laundry. We are darkly and irretrievably given over to the pernicious palaverings of those whom Mr. Robert W. Chambers has aptly termed "repairers of reputations."

In view of the premises, it may appear at once paradoxical and perverse to attempt any criticism at all, especially of the works of a decadent like Oscar Wilde, whose mere name to many is a synonym for the appalling degeneracy of an age lashed by the polemics of Ibsen, the objurgations of Tolstoi, the satire of Shaw, and the invective of Nordau. All that pertains to Wilde has for long been *res tacenda* in English society; and he himself, to use



his own phrase, has passed from a sort of eternity of fame to a sort of eternity of infamy. The current revival of interest in Wilde finds its source in many recent brochures and biographies, and in the publication of his collected works. In many instances, these critical works dealing with Wilde have been marred by wrong-headed judgment, unhealthy defence, and attempted justification. The fatal flaw of contemporary criticism, as Brunetière says, is that we do not see our contemporaries from a sufficient height and distance. That we are unable to profit by what Nietzsche terms "the pathos of distance", is a deficiency that cannot be remedied. But at least it is the prerogative of art, peculiarly of the art of criticism, to make the attempt, if not to fix the position, certainly to express judgment upon the work of contemporaries. Irresistibly there arises the conscientious proposition of the question whether the work, and not the life, of Wilde is worthy of genuine critical study. In speaking of Sainte Beuve, self-styled the "naturalist of the human heart", Emile Faguet once remarked that men are, without being entirely right, at least not entirely wrong in ignoring many faults in the man who possesses the virtue proper to his own profession. People are accustomed to overlook dissipation in the brave soldier, intolerance in the compassionate priest, harshness in the successful ruler. One might even instance that frail woman, men-

tioned in Holy Scripture, who was forgiven because she loved much. The point of departure for an estimate of Wilde is to be found, neither in a wrong-headed sense of outrage against society nor in a groping for hopeless excuse behind the imperfect researches of pathological criminology. The *raison d'être* of any future study of Wilde is to be found either in the palliative charm of his personality as friend and temperament as artist, or in the orchidaceous modernity and brilliant exoticism of his spoken and written art. There is nothing morbid or meretricious in a sympathetic search for the master-key to the secret of his temperament and of his art. A justification of his life is a contradiction in terms: there can be no defence of the indefensible. In art, as in life, much virtue inheres in the professional conscience; and the peccable artist in all ages has been granted a hearing on account of his unfaltering love of art. "If one loves art at all", Wilde once wrote, "one must love it beyond all other things in the world, and against such love the reason, if one listened to it, would cry out. There is nothing sane about the worship of beauty. It is something entirely too splendid to be sane. Those of whose lives it forms the dominant note will always seem to the world to be pure visionaries." And with all his affectation of singularity, his assumption of the dangerous and delightful distinction of being differ-

ent from others, his joyous treading of the primrose path of self-exploitation, his æsthetic posturing, charlatanry, and *blague*—Oscar Wilde was assuredly a personality of whose life art formed the dominant note. X

The biography of the soul of a decadent such as D'Annunzio, Verlaine, Dowson, or Wilde connotes the infinitely delicate and complex task of tracing that thin demarcative line which divides the famous from the infamous. Nor is the contemplation of the personal failure of a brilliant artist like Wilde—drifting derelict upon the tumultuous sea of passion—either congenial or edifying. There is no more tragic spectacle than that of a man of genius who is not a man of honor. And yet, until vaster and more definitive studies of the problems of homosexuality, of degeneracy, and of criminal pathology shall have been completed, Wilde will continue to be what Byron has been aptly termed: “a fascinating trouble”. There is a sort of melancholy fascination inherent in the determination of the causes underlying discrepancy between purpose and performance, between art and morality. The spirit warreth against the flesh, the flesh against the spirit. The selfsame soul which joyfully mounts to the shining summits of art cries forth its despairing *Mea Culpa* from the depths of life. In the heart of every man is lodged not only a *Paradiso*, but a *Purgatorio*.

As artist and man, Oscar Wilde might truly have said with Omar Khayyam: "I myself am Heaven and Hell."

There exists no more salient exemplification of the reality of the identity between destiny and human character than is to be discovered in the case of Oscar Wilde. The *crux* of his mania was blindness to the truth that the man who is the lackey of his passion can never be the master of his fate. The quintessential secret of his *débâcle* is found in the fact that this leader in the ranks of individualism was not the captain of his own soul. "Not even the most insignificant actions", says one of Echegaray's characters in *El Gran Galeoto*, "are in themselves insignificant or lost for good or evil. For, concentrated by the mysterious influences of modern life, they may reach to immense effects." Wilde's life signally exemplifies, in Amiel's words, "the fatality of the consequences incident to human acts." It was Wilde's tragedy to drink to the dregs "the bitter tonic draught of experience", and to realize, in infinite wretchedness and isolation, the truth of George Eliot's dictum that consequences are un pitying. In his own words, "I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud on the housetop." What strange and pathetic prophecy in his eery poem, *Hélas!*

To drift with every passion till my soul  
Is a stringèd lute on which all winds can play,  
Is it for this that I have given away  
Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control?  
Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll  
Scrawled over on some boyish holiday  
With idle songs for pipe and virelay,  
Which do but mar the secret of the whole.

Surely there was a time I might have trod  
The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance  
Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God.  
Is that time dead? Lo! with a little rod  
I did but touch the honey of romance—  
And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

No one would deny to Wilde the title of a Prince of Paradoxers. And yet this acolyte of the obverse, to whom perversity was a passion, never created so puzzling a paradox as the paradox of his own life. He to whom humanity was always a disquieting problem has bequeathed himself as a far more disquieting problem to humanity. Irony incarnate, yet unconscious, lay in his reiterated injunction that it is not so much what we say, nor even what we do, but what we *are* that eternally matters. Like Domini Enfielden, he yearned to live and to live more abundantly—"to be, to know, to feel . . . to go through everything, to turn every page, to experience all that can be experienced upon the earth." He early confessed that he "wanted to eat of the fruit of all

the trees in the garden of the world"; and he went forth into the world with that passion in his soul. But he ate only the bitter-sweet fruit of the trees of pleasure; and it turned to ashes upon his tongue. If he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, it was knowledge of evil, not of good. This master of the half-truth is condemned in the very phrase; it was the fate of his character not simply to know, but to wish to know, only the half of the truth, of the meaning of life.

"Virtue", says Bernard Shaw, "consists, not in abstaining from vice, but in not desiring it." Judging by the criterion of this post-Nietzschean valuation of virtue, Wilde was, constitutionally and congenitally, one of the most vicious of men. If Wilde could be termed virtuous in any sense, it was in no other than the professional sense. In his life as artist, it was his sincerity to be insincere. At times it seemed as if he found reality in artificiality, sanctuary in a pose. The final verity about the man is that, through the refractory lens of his temperament, all truth appeared encased in a paradox. Far from being universal or fundamental, truth to Wilde was so individual, so personal a thing that the moment it became the property of more than one person, it became a falsehood. If his art ever ceased to live for its own sake, it was because it lived for Wilde's sake. Indeed Wilde was of his essence what the

French call *personnel*; and a work of art, as he phrased it, is always the unique result of an unique temperament. To Ibsen, creation in art consisted in holding judgment day over oneself. To Wilde, creation in art consisted in the celebration of a holiday of mentality. In the guise of interpreter of the modern spirit, he was always happening upon the discovery of a great, an unique truth; and this he flippantly and condescendingly consented to communicate to that boorish monster, the public. Art was an ivory tower in which dwelt the long-haired seraph of the sunflower. The drama was merely a platform for the *flair* of the *flaneur*. All the world was a stage for the wearer of the green carnation.

It has ceased to be a paradox to attribute an exalted, if extravagant sense of virtue, sanity, and morality to Walt Whitman, to Elisée Reclus, to Bernard Shaw. Their notions of right, of justice, and of morality differ from those of the average man—Zola's *l'homme moyen sensual*—in that they sharply diverge from, and not infrequently transcend, the conventional standards, the perfunctory concepts of right living and just conduct. If Wilde could be said to have any morals, it was a faith in the artistic validity of poetic justice. If he could be said to have any conscience, it was the professional conscience of the impeccable artist—of Poe, of Pater,

of Sainte Beuve. If he could be said to have a sense of right, it was a sense of the right of the artist to live his own untrammelled life.

Nothing is easier than acquiescence in Wilde's dictum that the drama is the meeting place of art and life. And yet nowhere more clearly than in Wilde's own plays do we find the purposed divorce of art from life. It was his fundamental distinction, in the rôle of critic as artist, to trace with admirable clarity the line of demarcation between unimagina-tive realism and imaginative reality. The methods of Zola and the Naturalistic school always drew Wilde's keenest critical thrusts. The greatest heresy, in his opinion, was the doctrine that art consists in holding up the camera to nature. He was even so reactionary as to assert that the only real people are the people who never exist. The view of Stendhal, that fiction is *un miroir qui se promène sur la grande route*, found as little favor in his eyes as the doctrine of Pinero that the dramatists are the brief and abstract chronometers of the time. The function of the artist, in Wilde's view, is to invent, not to chronicle; and he even goes so far as to say that if a novelist is base enough to go to life for his person-ages, he should at least pretend that they are crea-tions, and not boast of them as copies. To the charge that the people in his stories are "mere catch-penny revelations of the non-existent", he unblush-ingly retorted: "Life by its realism is always spoil-



ing the subject-matter of art. The supreme pleasure in literature is to realize the non-existent."

In any study of the works of Wilde—especially of his plays, which have not received any save casual and desultory treatment in English—it is desirable, in so far as may be possible, to isolate the man from his works. Thus one may be enabled to view them, not at all in relation to Wilde's life, but solely from the standpoint of their validity and authenticity as works of art. Bernard Shaw has naïvely confessed that the chief obstacle to the success of his plays has been himself! For totally different reasons, the chief obstacle to the study of Wilde's plays has been Wilde. The "insincerity" of this artist in attitudes was, in his own words, simply a method by which he could multiply his personality.

## II

One year before Arthur Pinero and two years before Bernard Shaw, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born at No. 1 Merrion Square, Dublin, on October 16, 1854. His parents, both brilliant and distinguished figures, took a leading part in the life of their age; and certain of the distinctive traits of each find striking reproduction in their unhappy son. Mr., afterwards Sir, William

Wilde, Oscar's father, early distinguished himself in the field of letters; but the logical bent of his mind was toward medical study, which he pursued in London, Berlin and Vienna. He devoted his first year's fees as a physician, indeed, more, the first thousand pounds of his professional earnings, to the founding of St. Mark's Ophthalmic Hospital where the poor could be treated for eye and ear diseases; and his distinction as a physician won him the title of "the father of modern otology." He received many honors, including knighthood, during his lifetime; but it was Oscar Wilde's misfortune to inherit from his father, not his talents as a scientific specialist, but his vicious traits as immoralist and libertine. Just as Bernard Shaw derived his musical bent from his mother, so Oscar Wilde derived his literary sense, in great measure, from his brilliant mother—Jane Francesca Elgee. Signing her verses "Speranza" and her letters "John Fanshaw Ellis", this woman of genius, as Sir Charles Gavan Duffy called her, contributed frequently to *The Nation*, of Dublin, from 1847 on; and her celebrated Nationalist manifesto, *Jacta Alea Est*, inspired by Williams' *The Spirit of the Nation*, gave her a notoriety little short of treasonable. In *savoir faire*, in all the arts of the *salon*, Lady Wilde was unexcelled; and it was the testimony of all who met her that she was a personage. In her son are reproduced certain marked characteristics: indifference to practical af-

fairs of life, brilliancy in the art of social converse, profound aversion to "the miasma of the commonplace", and a moral laxity of tone in conversation which, in her case, found no counterpart in her actual life.

"Under 'direct inheritance' or 'transmission by blood'", records Wilde's latest biographer, "may, perhaps, be classed his literary capacity, his gifts of poetry, languages, of ready mastery of difficult studies, his love of the beautiful, the sound common-sense of his normal periods, his family and personal pride, and his moral courage in the face of danger, but also an indifference to the dangers of alcoholism, an aversion from failure, physical, social and mental, an exaggerated esteem, on the other hand, for wealth, titles and social success, a tolerance for moral laxness."

As a very small lad, Oscar was spoken of by his mother as "wonderful", as a child of phenomenal versatility. His fondness for mystery and romance was born through his tours with his father in quest of archæological treasures; and his natural wit was sharpened by listening to Ireland's thought and wit in the *salon* of his mother. It was at his father's dinner-table and in his mother's drawing-room, as has been justly said, that the best of his early education was obtained; but he doubtless gained not a little from his schooling at the Portora Royal School. He had no aptitude for mathematics, nor

was his talent for composition at this time in evidence; but he had a marvellous faculty of intellectual absorption, mastering the contents of a book in an incredibly short space of time. He kept aloof from his companions, practised his wit in bestowing nicknames upon them, and enjoyed nothing more than leading his teachers into long discussions of some point which "intrigued his fancy". His brilliancy in reading and interpreting the classics was proven at the time of his entrance to Trinity College, Dublin—October, 1871. Like his great-uncle Ralph, Oscar won the Berkeley Gold Medal at Trinity, as well as a scholarship; but he never held his scholarship, preferring to seek better things at Oxford.

"I want to get to the point", Oscar Wilde says in *De Profundis*, "where I shall be able to say quite simply, and without affectation, that the two great turning-points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford and when society sent me to prison." Certain it is that at Oxford he first began to exhibit that devotion to art, that attachment to literature, and that passion for beauty which were the foundations for whatsoever of value is to be found in his writings. Here he sat under Ruskin; and there is little reason to doubt that the artistic and personal influence of Ruskin upon Wilde was far from inconsiderable. "The influence of Ruskin was so great", we read in a biographical notice of Wilde, "that Mr. Wilde, though holding games in abomina-

tion, and detesting violent exercise, might have been seen of gray November mornings breaking stones on the roadside—not unbribed, however; ‘he had the honour of filling Mr. Ruskin’s especial wheelbarrow’, and it was the great author of ‘Modern Painters’ himself who taught him how to trundle it.” There is, however, little reason to believe, in spite of the evidence of *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, that in Wilde’s mind were sown any of the seeds of that “practical interest in social questions which is the ‘Oxford Movement of to-day.’” Ruskin’s influence upon Wilde is chiefly exhibited in the growth of the latter’s artistic tastes; for Wilde’s rooms at Oxford were noted for their beautiful decoration and for the display of collections of “objects of *vertu*”. Recall his well-known remark: “Oh, would that I could live up to my blue china!” In his early Oxford days he began to contribute both prose and verse to magazines published in Dublin, notably to *Kottabos* and *The Irish Monthly*. About this time he visited Italy; and although inclined, through the spiritual element in art, to Roman Catholicism,—even writing notable poems such as *Rome Unvisited*, which won high praise from Cardinal Newman,—his faltering faith lacked the strength of ultimate conviction.

Wilde’s journey in Greece with the party which accompanied John Pentland Mahaffy was the profoundest determinative influence which had yet come

into his life. And if it did not make of him a "healthy Pagan", certainly it was a confirmation of all his dreams and visions of beauty undreamed and unimaginable. In his own words, in regard to this experience, "the worship of sorrow gave place again to the worship of beauty." For a time he dreamed of the beauty of religion; for all time afterwards he devoted himself in art to the religion of beauty. It has been suggested that Wilde's classical studies at Oxford so familiarized him with certain pathological manifestations that he really failed to realize their horror; and the brilliant French symbolist, Henri de Regnier, does not hesitate to attribute his downfall to the fact that he had so steeped himself in the life of by-gone days that he did not realize the world in which he was actually living. Oscar Wilde believed that "he lived in Italy at the time of the Renaissance or in Greece at the time of Socrates. He was punished for a chronological error . . ."

During his stay at Oxford, he acquitted himself very ably in his classes; and possibly through the happy chance that Ravenna, which he had recently visited, was announced as the topic for the Newdigate competition, he won the Newdigate prize for English Verse in 1878. This poem exhibits a great advance on his previous work, and in many respects, despite its lack of a controlling central thought, deserves high praise. On leaving Oxford, he went up

to London in the rôle of a "Professor of Æsthetics and Art critic", according to Foster's statement in the *Alumni Oxoniensis*. Now he began to assume that "affectation of singularity" which so distinctively marked the author of *Melmoth the Wanderer*—that eccentric genius, the toast of Baudelaire and Balzac—Oscar Wilde's great-uncle, Charles Maturin. Like Zola, like Shaw, Wilde realized that this is an age of push and advertisement. He saw years of neglect at the hands of the public stretching out drearily before him if he did not force himself, by sensational methods, upon its attention. When the treasures of his mentality went for naught, he unhesitatingly focussed the public gaze upon the eccentricities of his personality. Like Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, he assumed the "dangerous and delightful distinction of being different from others". Prior to this time, his garb was characterized by no stigmata of affectation or preciosity; but he now hit upon the spectacular device of *outré* and *bizarre* costume. Celebrities often exhibit a harmless and pardonable penchant for peculiarity of dress—the scarlet waistcoat of Gautier, the monk's cowl of Balzac, the *vaquero* costume of Joaquin Miller. In his rôle of æsthete, Wilde wore a "velvet coat, knee-breeches, a loose shirt with a turn-down collar, and a floating tie of some unusual shade, fastened in a Lavallière knot, and he not infrequently appeared in public carrying in his hand a lily or a sunflower,

which he used to contemplate with an expression of the greatest admiration!" It was Wilde's pompous pose, as the high priest of *Æstheticism*, to plume himself upon the discovery of whatsoever of real beauty exists in nature and art; by inference, those whose eyes were not thus opened to the miracles of the common day were "hopelessly private persons"—termed Philistines. Wilde and his cult were shining marks for the wit, satire and caricature of Du Maurier and Burnand; W. S. Gilbert caricatured Wilde in "Patience", and *Punch* overflowed with cartoons and skits of which the following is a typical example:

"Æsthete of Æsthetes!  
What's in a name?  
The poet is WILDE  
But his poetry's tame."

Wilde's notoriety was enhanced by a pseudo social lionization; but in spite of a certain sort of superficial lustre attaching to him, he was regarded with suspicion—a fear that at any time his lion's skin, as in the fable, might fall to the ground and reveal only a braying ass. Thus he began his career under the cloud of a not unjustifiable suspicion of *réclame*, quackery, and imposture; and it is a suspicion that not only his life, but even his death, have been inadequate to allay. At any rate his notoriety, though won by questionable and unworthy means, enabled



him to secure a publisher for his first volume of verse; and won him an invitation to lecture in the United States. He was encouraged to visit America not as the author of a book of poems which had been most widely read in America, but as the much-discussed leader of the "Æsthetic Movement and School." Some verses in the *World*, in which Wilde is labelled "Ego Upto Snuffibus Poeta", appeared just before his departure for New York; they sound the dominant note of public opinion:

"Albeit nurtured in Democracy,  
And liking best that state Bohemian  
Where each man borrows sixpence and no man  
Has aught but paper collars; yet I see  
Exactly where to take a liberty.

"Better to be thought one, whom most abuse  
For speech of donkey and for look of goose,  
Than that the world should pass in silence by.  
Wherefore I wear a sunflower in my coat,  
Cover my shoulders with my flowing hair,  
Tie verdant satin round my open throat,  
Culture and love I cry, and ladies smile,  
And seedy critics overflow with bile,  
While with my Prince long Sykes's meal I share."

Wilde paid to the full the penalty for making himself a "motley to the view." Never afterwards was he allowed to forget that the way of the *blagueur* is hard.

In America he was greeted with amused increduli-

ty, treated as a diverting sort of literary curiosity, ridiculed, satirized, caricatured. He was violently attacked in many quarters, and few cared to face the ridicule inevitably consequent to any defence of his theories and practice. Not a few personages of distinction, nevertheless, showed him courtesy and hospitality, among whom may be mentioned John Boyle O'Reilly, Julia Ward Howe, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Clara Morris, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Joaquin Miller, General Grant and the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher. Although Wilde, as one of his friends records, suffered poignantly from the attacks directed against him, he cannot be absolved from the charge of occasionally provoking them. "I am not exactly pleased with the Atlantic. It is not so majestic as I expected", gave rise to an infinitude of humorous verse; and his oft-quoted remark about Niagara was nothing more nor less than a clever bait thrown out to the press: "I was disappointed with Niagara. Most people must be disappointed with Niagara. Every American bride is taken there, and the sight of the stupendous waterfall must be one of the earliest if not the keenest disappointments in American married life." Most people attended his lectures out of vulgar curiosity to see and to laugh at this licensed buffoon; it did not seem to occur to them, as we read in a contemporary review in the *Sun*, that his lecture was "not a performance so trifling as to insult the intelligence

of the audience, but a carefully prepared essay which proves its author to be a man of cultivation, taste, imagination, education and refinement." One of his lectures was described to me, by one who heard it, as a weak solution of Ruskin; and this is a fair indication of the contemporary valuation. The truth of the matter is that his lecture on "The English Renaissance" was a very artistic and capable, if somewhat paradoxical and precious appreciation of the significance of that movement. And his "Decorative Art in America" was a simple and straightforward expression of many sane, practical truths which the utilitarian thrust of modern art has amply substantiated. Not by any means is it to be understood that Wilde originated all the ideas he gracefully presented; he simply gave concrete expression to much that was in the air in the art criticism of the day. "As a plea for the encouragement of the handicraftsman", writes Mr. Glaenzer in regard to "Decorative Art in America"; "for the rejection of the hideously naturalistic tendency in house-furnishing; for the establishment of museums, enriched by the finest examples from the finest periods of decorative art; for their beautiful surroundings for children, and for schools in which these children might develop their artistic proclivities under the guidance of artists and capable artisans—as a *plea* for all that is beautiful, noble and sane in art, this lecture falls little short of being a masterpiece."

Now that his "apostolic task" was concluded, to his secret relief, Wilde lightly disclaimed any intention of continued charlatanry. Of his connection with the *Æsthetic Movement*, he said in 1883: "That was the Oscar Wilde of the second period. I am now in my third period." He settled in Paris in the Hotel Voltaire, and soon made himself known, through presentation copies of his *Poems*, to a number of the leading figures in the world of art and letters in Paris. Well received in many quarters, Wilde numbered among his acquaintances Victor Hugo, Edmond de Goncourt, Paul Bourget, Alphonse Daudet, Sarah Bernhardt, and many of the leaders of the impressionist school of painters. His success in Parisian circles would have been greater if he had only possessed the necessary reserve and tact. His desire to "astonish the natives", to indulge in affectations and extravagances of dress, and to utter paradoxical *blague* about art and letters, rather rubbed the Parisians the wrong way. He took Balzac for his model, wore the Balzacian cowl whenever he was at work, and carried on the street a replica of that celebrated *Canne de Monsieur Balzac* perpetuated in the novel of Delphine Gay. In certain cases only is imitation the sincerest form of flattery; in this case, however, it seemed the insincerest form of absurdity. His imitation of Balzac took one good direction: he began to take infinite pains with his art. During

this period Wilde wrote *The Duchess of Padua*, a five-act drama in the Elizabethan style. Under the influence of Poe, through Baudelaire, whose *Fleurs de Mal* made a profound impression upon Wilde, he wrote a strangely pagan and sensual poem *The Sphinx*—an excellent type of the derivative poem, of the art which is not spontaneous. But all his diligent application temporarily went for naught. *The Duchess of Padua* was refused by Mary Anderson for whom it was written; and the proceeds of the sale of Wilde's property in Ireland could not long survive the onslaughts made upon it by his extravagant mode of life; his literary work brought him nothing. And so, in the summer of 1883, he returned to London to try a hazard of new fortunes. There he was conspicuously dedicated to oblivion by a prominent journal in an article entitled "Exit Oscar." To which Wilde buoyantly replied: "If it took Labouchere three columns to prove that I was forgotten, then there is no difference between fame and obscurity."

During the years from 1883 to 1891, the output of Wilde was quite small—he gave himself up to the art of living rather than to the art of writing. For a time, at first, he was compelled once more to take the lecture platform, this time in England; but he resolutely refused to make capital out of the eccentricities of his personal appearance and costume. During one of his lecture tours, he met in

Dublin the lovely Constance Lloyd, who became his wife on May 29, 1884. His wife's dowry enabled the young couple to lease a house in Tite street, decorated under the direction of Whistler, who became a close acquaintance of Wilde. For several years Wilde wrote various signed and unsigned articles for the press, purely ephemeral in character, and a number of those beautiful modern fairy tales which combine a delicacy of fancy with a touch of social philosophy, rarely charming and arresting. But for Wilde *la lutte pour la vie* became increasingly difficult; and even Whistler—in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*—took a hand in facilitating his downhill progress. When Messrs. Cassell and Company offered him the editorship of *The Woman's World* in 1887, he was in no position to refuse; and his connection with that magazine lasted from October, 1887, to September, 1889. If he was not precisely a success as an editor, though conscientious and industrious at this period, it was because his taste was too refined, too artistic and subtle for the clientèle of his magazine. It is the verdict of his greatest admirers, especially among foreign critics, that the works which he wrote between the time of his marriage and the year 1892 entitle him to an exalted place in English literature, and give him rank as a philosopher of acute penetration and delicate insight. There were *The Happy Prince* and *The House of*

*Pomegranates* — fanciful *Märchen* shot through with a sensitive and beautiful social pity, like embroidered, jewelled fabrics firmly filiated with a crimson thread. There was *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, reminiscent of Balzac's *Peau de Chagrin*, rich in opulent fancy, in subtle mystery, and in the strangely ominous prevision of its author's own coming fate. And there, too, was *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, that brilliant and paradoxical revelation of Wilde's *état d'âme*—a brochure which has gone triumphantly forth to the very ends of the earth. Last, and highest, was *Intentions*, that miraculous masterpiece of connected writings, with its inverted truisms and forthright paradoxes, its fanciful reasoning and reasonable fancy—quintessence of style, of form, of taste in art.

During the years from 1892 to 1895, Wilde attained to remarkable success as a playwright; and at last the rewards of literature flowed without cessation into the pockets of this lavish spendthrift. *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, were phenomenal successes; and at one time three of Wilde's plays could have been witnessed on a single night in London. But in March, 1895, the *débâcle* came; and the information for criminal libel which Wilde, in a state verging upon intoxication, laid against the Marquess of Queensberry, was the beginning of his undoing. Wilde at

last was hoist by his own petard. The history of the two trials, Wilde's condemnation and disgrace, his two years of poignant anguish and physical suffering in prison, his subsequent piteous descent to disaster and death—the harrowing details may be learned elsewhere. Suffice it to say that his predisposition to vice through inheritance, the fearful effect upon him of intoxicants which seemed to lash his brain to madness, and the indulgence in ultra-stimulative food and drink in the two or three years immediately preceding his disgrace serve, in the eyes of the specialist in pathology and degeneracy, as indicative causes of his downfall and ruin. There survive from the days of imprisonment his greatest poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and that soul autobiography *De Profundis*—morbid, pitiable, yet wonderful *mélange* of confession and palliation, penance and defiance, self-incrimination and exculpation. Wonderful document—true confession or disingenuous plea, soul creed or soul blasphemy!

“Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth.” There is no means, to be sure, of escaping the everlasting return of life upon art—art, the mirror which the Narcissus of artists holds up to himself. Let us, however, remember with Novalis that he who is of power higher than the first is a genius. It is Nietzsche who says, “All that is profound loves a mask.” And even if, occasionally



and unwittingly, we traverse the circuit from art to life, at least we may have the satisfaction of making the attempt to dissociate the merits of the dramatist from the demerits of the man.

### III

In 1882, Wilde wrote to Mr. R. D'Oyly Carte, manager of the Savoy Theatre, London, that his play *Vera; or The Nihilists* was meant not to be read, but to be acted. This opinion has never received any support from either critic or public. Written when Wilde was only twenty-two years old (*The New York World*, August 12, 1883), this play early enrolled him under that *drapeau romantique des jeunes guerriers* of which Théophile Gautier speaks; yet the time doubtless came when Wilde regarded *Vera*, as he certainly regarded his first volume of poems, merely in the light of a *péché de jeunesse*. Unlike Ibsen, Pinero or Phillips, Wilde was fortified by experience neither as actor nor manager; there is no record that he ever, like Bernard Shaw, acted even in amateur theatricals. A cousin in near degree to W. G. Wills, the dramatist, painter and poet, Wilde may have derived his dramaturgic talent in some measure from the same source. In youth he learned the graceful arts of conversation in the brilliant salon of his mother,

Lady Wilde; and his predilection for the dialogue form early revealed itself in certain of his critical essays.

The play *Vera* ushers us into the *milieu* of Henry Seton Merriman's *The Sowers*, but it bears all the fantastic earmarks of the yellow-backed fustian of the melodramatic yarn-spinner, Marchmont. One might easily imagine it to be the boyish effusion of a romantic youth in the present day of Von Plehve, Gorki, and the Douma. "As regards the play itself", wrote Wilde to the American actress, Marie Prescott, in July, 1883, "I have tried in it to express within the limits of art that Titan cry of the people for liberty which, in the Europe of our day, is threatening thrones and making Governments unstable from Spain to Russia, and from north to southern seas. But it is a play, not of politics, but of passion. It deals with no theories of Government, but with men and women simply; and modern Nihilistic Russia, with all the terror of its tyranny and the marvel of its martyrdoms, is merely the fiery and fervent background in front of which the persons of my dream live and love. With this feeling was the play written, and with this aim should the play be acted." Despite these lofty and promising words, the play warrants no serious consideration—even though it won the admiration of the great American actor, Lawrence Barrett.

A pseudo-*Volksdrama*, *Vera* images the con-

flict between despotism and nihilism, between a vacillating, terror-obsessed Czar and a Russian Charlotte Corday. The "love interest" inheres in the struggle of the Czarevitch, who is in sympathy with the people, between his duty to the Empire and his love for the people's champion, the Nihiliste Vera. The theme is one that well might fire to splendid efforts; but instead of creatures of flesh and blood, looming solid in a large humanity, we see only thin cardboard profiles—bloodless puppets shifted hither and thither, as with Sardou, at the bidding of the mechanical showman. One-sided in the possession of only one feminine rôle, the play is largely taken up with interminable *longueurs* of pointless persiflage between superfluous characters. To one who knows the later Wilde, *Vera* seems less like a predecessor of the comedies than a contemporary parody; this Wilde has acquired no mastery of the arts of epigram, paradox and repartee. In the *dénouement*, Vera, chosen by lot to assassinate her lover the Czarevitch, now become Czar, turns upon her own breast the dagger meant for him, and then tosses it over the balcony to the ravening conspirators below with the cry, "I have saved Russia!"—this is the very acme of the "theatric" in the worst sense, the very quintessence of Adelphi melodrama. Not inapposite, perhaps, was the characteristic paragraph in *Punch* (December 10, 1881) under "Impressions du Théâtre":—

The production of Mr. Oscar Wilde's play "Vera" is deferred. Naturally no one would expect a Veerer to be at all certain; it must be, like a pretendedly infallible forecast, so very weather-cocky. "Vera" is about Nihilism; this looks as if there was nothing in it. But why did Mr. O. Wilde select the Adelphi for his first appearance as a dramatic author, in which career we wish him all the success he may deserve? Why did he not select the Savoy? Surely where there's a donkey cart—we should say D'Oyly Carte—there ought to be an opportunity for an 'Os-car?

In the Wilde of the "third period", as he described himself in 1883, is revealed a strangely different man from the apostle of æstheticism. If he has not learned to scorn delights, at least he has learned to live laborious days. He takes up his quarters at the Hotel Voltaire in Paris, and though still guilty of affectation in his assumption of the cane and cowl of Balzac, yet he takes the great French master for his model and disciplines himself to that unremitting labor which, in Balzac's view, is the *sine qua non*, the law, of art. Recall the precious anecdote of Wilde over his manuscript—deleting a comma in the forenoon and re-inserting it in the afternoon! In these days of the theatrical "star", for whom "parts" are especially written—Cyrano for Coquelin, Vanna for Mme. Maeterlinck, The Sorceress for Bernhardt, Ulysses for Tree, Lady Cicely Waynflete for Terry, and so on—Wilde thought to play his part in writing *The Duchess of*

*Padua* for Mary Anderson, the distinguished actress, now Mrs. de Navarro.

In a letter to *The Times*, London, March 3, 1893, Wilde affirmed: "I have never written a play for any actor or actress, nor shall I ever do so. Such work is for the artisan in literature, not for the artist." But this affirmation is both illogical and disingenuous; and is belied by the account of his biographer.

*The Duchess of Padua*, with its Websterian title, is a play laid in the sixteenth century—century of Paolo and Francesca, of Dante and Malatesta—century of tears and terror, of poetry and passion, of madness and blood. Though of the age of Dante, it is far from being written in the Dantesque style. While lounging in his cowl à la Balzac, Wilde was evidently studying Victor Hugo instead; and in *The Duchess of Padua* there is not a little besides of the bombast, fustian and balderdash of Webster and Tourneur. The play reeks with souvenirs of Shakspeare—with its mechanical conversational by-play, its lines from the *Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth*, its rhetoric, exaggeration, and top-loftical strain. Wilde was only too ready to employ the "strong" curtain as a concession to modern taste; in every other respect, this play, in pure externals, is so faithful in its reproduction of the Elizabethan style as to seem but one remove from refined caricature.

And yet the play possesses real interest and charm, not perhaps for its subject but because of its spiritual and emotional content—the violently transitional moods of romantic passion. It is a tale, in five acts, of the love of the gentle Beatrice, Duchess of Padua, and of the young Guido Ferranti, sworn to avenge the inhuman murder of his noble father at the hands of the old and heartless duke, the husband of Beatrice. Ferranti and Beatrice have just confessed their love for each other, when the pre-arranged message reaches Ferranti that the hour to strike down the Duke is come. He tears himself away from Beatrice in definitive farewell, with poignant agony, crying out that a certain insurmountable obstacle stands in the way of their love. That night, as he pauses outside the Duke's chamber meditating upon assassination, there comes to Ferranti the belated recognition not only that he can never approach Beatrice again with the blood of the murdered Duke upon his hands, but that such a revenge is deeply unworthy of the memory of his noble father. But as Anael comes forth from the murder of the Prefect to her Djabal, comes forth Beatrice to her Guido. For under the tyranny of her love for Guido, she has slain him to whom she was ever but a worthless chattel—the Duke, the sole obstacle to the fulfilment of her passion. Guido recoils from her upon whose hands is the blood which he himself had solemnly—but suddenly!—refused to

shed. And though Beatrice, like Juliet, is transformed into a very "Von Moltke of love", she cannot, with all the mustered array of her forces, storm the bastion of Guido's soul. So sudden and so supreme is her own revulsion of feeling that she finds herself passionately denouncing Ferranti to the passers-by as the assassin of her husband. Follows the trial of Ferranti for his life—a scene quite memorable for its undulation of emotional process, the conflicting fears and hopes of the heart-wrung Duchess, and the crisis: Ferranti's false confession that the murderer is none other than himself. Visiting the condemned Ferranti in his cell, the heart-broken Duchess, in the excess of her spiritual agony, takes poison; and Guido, realizing at last the inner, essential nobility of her character, avows for her his undying love, and dies upon the point of his dagger.

*The Duchess of Padua* is noteworthy for its tender lyrism, the delicate beauty of its imagery, and its glow of youthful fire; and despite its mimetic stamp, displays real power in instrumentation of feeling and in the temperamental and passional nuances of its mood. The play links itself to Hardy and to Whitman, rather than to Shakspeare, in its intimation of purity of purpose as the sole criterion of deed. For here Wilde, concerned less with the primitive basis of individuality than with the fundamental impulses of instinctive temperament, reveals

life as fluid and evolutionary. "In every creature", writes Hedwig Lachmann, the critic of Wilde, "lurks the readiness for desperate deeds. But when all is over, man remains unchanged. His nature does not change, because for a moment he has been torn from his moorings. After the stormy waters which forced its overflow have run their course, the river once more glides back into its bed." Like Maeterlinck's Joyzelle, Beatrice is forgiven, not because "Who sins for love sins not", but because she has loved much. In Wilde's own startling words—in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, written some eight years later—: "A man cannot always be estimated by what he does. He may keep the law and yet be worthless. He may break the law and yet be fine. He may be bad without ever doing anything bad. He may commit a sin against society, and yet realize through that sin his true perfection." Maeterlinck maintains that justice is a very mysterious thing, residing not in nature or in anything external, but, like truth, in ourselves. It is in this play, as Mr. William Archer has said, that Wilde reveals himself a poet of very high rank. Nothing is easier, and therefore possibly more misleading, than to say that *The Duchess of Padua* is not *du théâtre*; for the tests of its suitability for the stage have been inconclusive. To Wilde's intense disappointment, it was refused by Mary Anderson; but it was afterwards produced in the United States



by Lawrence Barrett with moderate success. Although announced as in preparation in the *Publishers' List* for 1894, *The Duchess of Padua* was actually not published until ten years later—in the fine translation of Dr. Max Meyerfeld of Berlin. In addition to its production in America with Lawrence Barrett and Mina Gale in the leading rôles, there have been at least two productions on the continent. At Hamburg, Germany, in December 1904, where it was produced under the most adverse circumstances, the play proved a failure, being withdrawn after three nights. And when it was produced in Berlin early in 1906 it was killed by the critics, resulting in a heavy loss for its champion, Dr. Meyerfeld. The play is "theatrical" in the proper sense, and, despite its reverses, might, I think, afford a suitable medium for the talent of a Julia Marlowe or an Ellen Terry under favoring conditions. But it is interesting to note that Wilde at the end of his life acknowledged, according to Mr. Robert Ross, that *The Duchess of Padua* artistically was of minor importance.

It was Wilde's pleasure, during his frequent visits to Paris, to delight the French world of art and letters with brilliant *causeries*. The masterly ease and exquisite purity of his French were a marvel to all who heard him. And Wilde once explained (*Pall Mall Gazette*, June 29, 1892) the idea he had in mind in writing the play of *Salomé*

in French:—"I have one instrument that I know I can command, and that is the English language. There was another instrument to which I had listened all my life, and I wanted once to touch this new instrument to see whether I could make any beautiful thing out of it. . . . Of course, there are modes of expression that a Frenchman of letters would not have used, but they give a certain relief or color to the play. A great deal of the curious effect that Maeterlinck produces comes from the fact that he, a Flamand by grace, writes in an alien language. The same thing is true of Rossetti, who, though he wrote in English, was essentially Latin in temperament." Mr. Ingleby pertinently quotes, in this connection, Max Beerbohm's remark that Walter Pater wrote English as though it were a dead language. Although Wilde's *Salomé* was revised by Marcel Schwob, it still bore after the revision, slight as it must have been, the trail of the foreigner. The English version, by Lord Alfred Douglas, is a marvellously sympathetic and poetic rendition.

In writing his *Salomé*, Wilde was strongly influenced by *Hérodias*, one of Gustave Flaubert's *Trois Contes*, though in Flaubert's tale it is at the instigation of Herodias that Salome dances for the head of the prophet. Gomez Carrillo, the Spanish translator of *Salomé*, records that Wilde said to him at the time he was writing the play: "If

for no other reason, I have always longed to go to Spain that I might see in the Prado Titian's Salome, of which Tintoretto once exclaimed: 'Here at last is a man who paints the very quivering flesh!' " And Carrillo mentions that only Gustave Moreau's picture, immortalized by Huysmans, unveiled for Wilde the "soul of the dancing princess of his dreams." Whilst Wilde has twisted the Biblical story to his individual ends, his interpretation is said to follow a fairly widespread tradition—as hinted at, for instance, in Renan's *Life of Jesus*. In both Sudermann's *Johannes* and Massenet's opera of *Herodiade*, Salome is the object of Herod's infatuation. Wilde has given the Biblical story an interpretation fundamentally dramatic in its abnormality. As a reconstitution of classic antiquity, *Salomé* belongs erotically to the school of Pierre Louys' *Aphrodite* and Anatole France's *Thais*. Like Poe, like Baudelaire, like Maeterlinck, Wilde has revealed with masterful if meretricious artistry, *le beau dans l'horrible*.

*Salomé* is a fevered dream, a poignant picture—it is like one of those excursions into the *macabre* with which Wilde succeeded in fascinating the Parisians. In it one discerns, as in a sheet of pale, quivering lightning, the revolting decadence of an age when vice was no prejudice and sensuality no shame. As in a piece of music, we hear the resonance of lawless passion, and the reverberations of

obscure, half-divined emotions. As in a picture, we feel rather than see the decadent genius of its tone and atmosphere. As in a lyric poem, jangled and out of tune, we shudderingly shrink from the spell of its mood—what Hagemann calls “eine bezwingende satte Stimmung.” The characters stand forth in chiselled completeness from the rich Galilean background like the embossed figures upon a Grecian urn. The insatiable, sensual Herodias, symbolic figure of the malady of that age; and Herod, the Tetrarch, drunkenly obsessed with profoundly disquieting inclinations to unlawful passion, ultimately cutting at a single blow the Gordian knot of his problem, for the untying of which he lacks both courage and conscience. Like Hebbel’s Daniel, Jokanaan is a wonderfully realized figure—the incarnation of a primitive, intolerant prophet, *vox clamantis in deserto*—commanding rapt attention far less by what he says than by what he is. And then there is Salome—young, fair, impressionable, upon the very threshold of womanhood. Recall the young Syrian’s description of her, hauntingly reminiscent of the Maeterlinck of *Pelléas and Mélisande*: “she is like a dove that has strayed . . . she is like a narcissus trembling in the wind . . . she is like a silver flower. . . . Her little white hands are fluttering like white butterflies.” At first, she is unmoved by any strangely perverse, nameless passion for the forbidden. But as in a dream, a memory of forgotten,

yet half-divined reality, erotic passion wakens under the mystic spell of Jokanaan's presence; and his scorn, his anathemas, his objurgations rouse to life and to revolt within her the dormant instincts of an Herodias. She will sing the swan song of her soul in the pæan of the dance, and for revenge's sweet sake so ensnare the plastic, unnatural Herod in the meshes of her perilous and dissolving beauty that he can refuse her nothing—even though it were the half of his kingdom. The world swims in a scarlet haze before her eyes, and nothing but the head of the prophet suffices to satiate her. And though lust, scorn, revenge, and death meet in that terrible kiss of a woman scorned, the hour of her own fate has struck. Impressive, awful, imperial, Herod speaks the laconic words: "Kill that woman!" Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judea, is crushed beneath the shields of the soldiers, and her death sounds the death knell of a decadent and degenerate age. A new epoch of culture is at hand.

In *Salomé*, Wilde depicts a crystallized embodiment of the age, rather than the age itself. To the naturalism of sensation is super-added stylistic symmetry and, in places, what Baudelaire termed *la grace suprême littéraire*. The influence of Maeterlinck is inescapable in the simplicity of the dialogue in places, the iterations and reverberations of the *leit motifs*, the evocation of the atmosphere and imminence of doom. Nature symbolically co-oper-

ates in intensifying the feeling of dread; and we dimly entertain the presentiment of vast and fateful figures lurking in the wings. In such passages as the long protests of Herod, there is all the diamantine and decorative opulence of Flaubert; and in the mouth of Salome the poetic phrasing holds at times a pearly, moonlit radiance. With all its verbal jewellery, the dialogue is at times momentarily laconic; as in the words of Salome in explanation of Herod's passion: "Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know not what it means. Of a truth I know it too well." Wilde declared that *Salomé* was a piece of music—with its progressive crescendo, emotional pæan and tragic finale. And Richard Strauss justified Wilde's dictum in his opera *Salomé* of far-flung notoriety, asymmetric in its form, barbaric in its passion, most arresting at the emotional climax of Salome's erotomania. It is significant that this, the one play of Wilde's not primarily written for the stage, is a true drama in the most real sense, bearing the stamp of the conviction of the real artist. No credence need be given the statement of Gomez Carrillo, in his *El Orígen de la Salome de Wilde*, that this play was written for Sarah Bernhardt. The play was written in Paris at the turn of the year 1891-2; and Wilde himself said to an interviewer (June, 1892),

a statement supported by Mr. St. John Hankin: "A few weeks ago I met Madame Sarah Bernhardt at Sir Henry Irving's. She had heard of my play, and asked me to read it to her. I did so, and she at once expressed a wish to play the title-rôle." It is lamentable that *Salomé* focusses attention upon abnormal and lascivious states of feeling, indicative of Wilde's own degeneracy; this impression is deepened and intensified by the "argument of the flesh", and the potent instrumentality of operatic music. And yet, withal, *Salomé* is Wilde's one dramatic achievement of real genius, unapproached as an individual and unique creation in the literature of the world.

Since Wilde's death, *The Duchess of Padua* has been printed in both German and English versions; of the unpublished plays, only *A Florentine Tragedy*, a fragment, was saved by Wilde's executor, Mr. Robert Ross, from the house at 16 Tite Street, Chelsea. The manuscript of *The Woman Covered with Jewels* has never yet come to light. Mr. Willard, the romantic actor, likewise possessed a copy of *A Florentine Tragedy*, agreeing in every particular with the one recovered by Mr. Ross; in each the opening scene was gone, showing that Wilde had never written it. "It was characteristic of the author", says Mr. Ross, "to have finished what he never began." It has since been published (Luce, Boston) with an introductory note by Mr. Ross; he

also narrated the history of the play's recovery in the *Tribune* (London) in June, 1906. The opening act has been supplied by Mr. T. Sturge Moore, well known as the poet of *The Vinedresser and Other Poems*, *Absalom*, *The Centaur's Booty*, etc., and the critic of Dürer and Correggio. This bit of reconstruction in *A Florentine Tragedy* is remarkable, alike for catching Wilde's tone and for its individual charm. Though the play was originally written for Mr. George Alexander and afterwards submitted to Mr. Willard, it never saw the footlights in England until June 18, 1906, when it was produced together with *Salomé* by the Literary Theatre Club, at the King's Hall, Covent Garden. In Dr. Max Meyerfeld's translation, the play has been produced with some slight success in Germany (Leipzig, Hamburg and Berlin), and bids fair, according to the conservatively minded Mr. Ross, to approximate to the success attained by *Salomé*.

*A Florentine Tragedy* is a much slighter performance than *Salomé*; and acting both deep and subtle is required to vitalize the characters into real human semblance. It is the triangular affair—with a difference; and the *dénouement* is a *tour de force*. In the absence of the merchant Simone, his fair young wife Bianca is visited by the Florentine Prince, Guido Bardi, and courted in Young Lochinvar fashion:



O, make no question, come!  
They waste their time who ponder o'er bad dreams.  
We will away to hills, red roses clothe,  
And though the persons who did haunt that dream  
Live on, they shall by distance dwindled, seem  
No bigger than the smallest ear of corn,  
That cowers at the passing of a bird;  
And silent shall they seem, out of earshot  
Those voices that could jar, while we gaze back  
From rosy caves upon the hill-brow open,  
And ask ourselves if what we see is not  
A picture merely—if dusty, dingy lives  
Continue there to choke themselves with malice.  
Wilt thou not come, Bianca? Wilt thou not?

Simone entering, interrupts the ardent courtship; and with southern subtlety feigns the utmost regard for his guest. They chat, with an undercurrent of meaning in their words, while the old merchant displays his gorgeous wares. Interest quickens in the discovery that Simone is "playing" the egoistic Guido, cunningly drawing him by almost imperceptible gradations into a trial of skill—or shall it be a duel? Bianca holds aloft a torch to the struggle until Simone disarms Guido. As they close with each other, daggers drawn, Bianca dashes her torch to the floor,—only in the end to hear Guido die the death of a poltroon. With an exclamation "Now for the other!" Simone rises from his bloody work and gazes at his trembling wife. The splendid man-

hood of her husband has dazzled her; and in wonder and subjugation she goes toward him with arms outstretched, murmuring the words, "Why did you not tell me you were so strong?" Her tremendous revulsion of feeling is matched by one no less instantaneous or momentous than her own. And with the words, "Why did you not tell me you were so beautiful?", Simone takes Bianca in his arms and kisses her on the mouth. Strange lovers, stranger reconciliation!

#### IV

A new, a strikingly different Wilde, next makes his *début* in the society comedy. Wilde's earlier plays brought him nothing, scarcely even notoriety; for the British public could not be persuaded to believe that any work of poetic beauty or dramatic art could emanate from a licensed jester, angler before all for the public stare. Wilde had incontestably established his reputation as a buffoon; and once a buffoon, always a buffoon! One may truly say of Wilde, as Brandes once said of Ibsen, that at this period of his life he had a lyrical Pegasus killed under him. Like Bernard Shaw, Wilde was forced to the conclusion that the brain had ceased to be a vital organ in English life. As he expressed it, the public used the classics as a means of checking the progress of

Art, as bludgeons for preventing the free expression of Beauty in new forms. It was his aim to extend the subject-matter of art; and this was distasteful to the public since it was the expression of an individualism defiant of public opinion. And to Wilde, public opinion represented the will of the ignorant majority as opposed to that of the discerning few. Far from holding that the public is the patron of the artist, Wilde vigorously maintained that the artist is always the munificent patron of the public. The very bane of his existence was the popular, yet profoundly erroneous, maxim that "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give." The work of art, he rightly avers, is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art. The drama must come into being, not for the sake of the theatre, but through the inner, vital necessity of the artist for self-expression. He scorned the field of popular novelism, not only because it was too ridiculously easy, but also because to meet the requirements of the sentimental public with its half-baked conceptions of art, the artist would have to "do violence to his temperament, would have to write, not for the artistic joy of writing, but for the amusement of half-educated people, and so would have to suppress his individualism, forget his culture, annihilate his style, and surrender everything that is valuable to him." In his search for lucrative employment for his individual talents, his eye fell upon the comic stage.

It dawned upon him that Tom Robertson, H. G. Byron and W. S. Gilbert—to say nothing of Sheridan—were still living factors in the English drama, and that the style of Dumas fils, in the Scriblishly “well-made” pattern, met the most important requirements of popular taste. While little scope was allowed the creator of the higher forms of dramatic art, in the field of burlesque and light, even farcical comedy, the artist was allowed very great freedom in England. It was under the pressure of such convictions that Wilde now sought a hazard of new fortunes.

The four society comedies which Wilde wrote in rapid succession, which immediately gained huge success in England, and have since been played to vastly appreciative audiences in Europe and the United States, are so similar in style, treatment and appeal as almost to warrant discussion as a unique *genre*. Only *The Importance of Being Earnest* really differentiates itself, generically, from its predecessors.

*Lady Windermere's Fan*, perhaps the most celebrated of Wilde's comedies, is concerned with the hackneyed *donnée* of the eternal triangle—the theme of *Odette*, *Le Supplice d'une Femme*, and countless other comedies of the French school. Only by means of the flashing dialogue is Wilde enabled to conceal the essential conventionality and threadbare melodrama of the plot. The

characters are lacking in the ultimate stamp of reality, functioning primarily as social types in a situation, only secondarily as individuals working out their own salvation. And yet somehow he has managed to give them the "tone of their time," and to endow them with that air of social ease in a drawing-room which is the essential to comedy in an enlightened society. The following scene in which Mrs. Erlynne discovers the letter of farewell from Lady Windermere to her husband, is insignificant and dramatically impressive; but it seems obviously suggested by the incident in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, which calls forth the title.

*Parker.* Her Ladyship has just gone out of the house.

*Mrs. Erlynne.* (*Starts, and looks at the servant with a puzzled expression on her face.*) Out of the house?

*Parker.* Yes, madam—her ladyship told me she had left a letter for his lordship on the table.

*Mrs. Erlynne.* A letter for Lord Windermere?

*Parker.* Yes, madam.

*Mrs. Erlynne.* Thank you. (*Exit Parker. The music in the ballroom stops.*) Gone out of her house! A letter addressed to her husband! (*Goes over to bureau and looks at letter. Takes it up and lays it down again with a shudder of fear.*) No, no! It would be impossible! Life doesn't repeat

its tragedies like that! Oh, why does this horrible fancy come across me? Why do I remember now the moment of my life I most wish to forget? Does life repeat its tragedies? (*Tears open letter and reads it, then sinks down into a chair with a gesture of anguish.*) Oh, how terrible! The same words that twenty years ago I wrote to her father! and how bitterly I have been punished for it! No; my punishment, my real punishment is to-night, is now!

One other scene, that in which Mrs. Erlynne finally persuades Lady Windermere to return to her husband and child, is a situation of very nearly real seriousness on the stage; it is Wilde's mistake to put into the mouth of Mrs. Erlynne only the words the average spectator expects her to say, not the expression of the sentiments a woman who had passed through her devastating experience would inevitably feel.

In *A Woman of No Importance*, Wilde pretends to break a lance in behalf of even justice at the hands of society for men and women who have committed indiscretions. In his own words, this play is the embodiment of his conviction that there should not be "one law for men and another law for women." He was too much preoccupied with his thesis to make his characters real human beings; and the epigrammatic brilliance of the dialogue gives a sort of family resemblance to many of the

"characters." Playing with great restraint, simplicity and *finesse*, Marion Terry as Mrs. Arbuthnot won the sympathy of her London audience at a recent revival; but all Beerbohm Tree's art could not accomplish the miracle of vitalizing Lord Illingworth. Hester Worsley argues with futility against a jury "packed" against her declamatory prudery; and Gerald is a brainless dolt. Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline Pontefract are delightful and naïve, comic admixtures of natural shrewdness, kindness of heart, and surpassing British ignorance and insularity. The opening scene is something new in drama, the forerunner of *Don Juan in Hell* and *Getting Married*; indeed, Wilde declared that he wrote the first act of *A Woman of No Importance* in answer to the complaint of the critics that *Lady Windermere's Fan* was lacking in action. "In the act in question," said Wilde, "there was absolutely no action at all. It was a perfect act!" Wilde once asked Ouida what she herself considered the chief feature in her work which won success. "I am the only living English writer," she replied, "who knows how two Dukes talk when they are by themselves!" It might, with truth, be said of Wilde that he was the only living English writer who knew how two Duchesses talk when they are by themselves.

*An Ideal Husband* is somewhat more compact and straightforward than either of the two previous

comedies; the dialogue is more immediately germane to the action; the epigram is less frequently employed for the sake of covering deficiencies of plot or tiding over lapses in interest. Wilde was a curious mixture of the ultra-modern and the sentimental reactionary. The triteness of his technique was balanced by his facility in contriving "scenes," "situations," and "curtains." The modernity of his dialogue is matched by the mawkish conventionality of his moral *fond*. The long soliloquy at the beginning of the third act of *Lady Windermere's Fan* is hopelessly *vieux jeu* to a generation bred on Ibsen's rigorous technique; and yet Wilde imitated Ibsen in long stage directions, descriptive of the characters of his plays. Bernard Shaw himself could not have improved upon Wilde's thumb-nail sketch of Sir Robert Chiltern:

A man of forty, but looking somewhat younger. Clean-shaven, with finely-cut features, dark-haired and dark-eyed. A personality of mark. Not popular—few personalities are. But intensely admired by the few, and deeply respected by the many. The note of his manner is that of perfect distinction, with a slight touch of pride. One feels that he is conscious of the success he has made in life. A nervous temperament, with a tired look. The finely-chiselled mouth and chin contrast strikingly with the romantic expression in the deepset eyes. The variance is suggestive of an almost complete separation of passion and intellect, as though thought and emotion were each isolated in its own



sphere through some violence of will-power. There is no nervousness in the nostrils, and in the pale, thin, pointed hands. It would be inaccurate to call him picturesque. Picturesqueness cannot survive the House of Commons. But Vandyck would have liked to paint his head.

The real difference between the spirit of Wilde and the spirit of Ibsen is exhibited in the dénouement of *An Ideal Husband* as contrasted with that of *The Pillars of Society*. Ibsen's "hero" ultimately confesses his moral delinquency in the most public way, and the curtain falls upon a self-humiliated and repentant man ready to "begin over again" in order to work out his own salvation. Aside from a good scare, Sir Robert Chiltern is not only allowed to go scot-free, but is actually elevated to a vacant seat in the Cabinet! Wilde is reported to have said: "Nobody else's work gives me any suggestion. It is only by entire isolation from everything that one can do any work. Idleness gives one the mood, isolation the condition. Concentration on one's self recalls the new and wonderful world that one presents in the color and cadence of words in movement." It is matter for regret that not Ibsen, but Sardou and Dumas *filis* usually gave Wilde his suggestions. For with all his faults, he possessed in rich measure "the sense of the theatre." His plays ran so smoothly that the public was convinced that it was an easy task to write them. At the height

of Wilde's fame, Bernard Shaw laconically remarked: "I am the only person in London who can't sit down and write an Oscar Wilde play at will!"

It was Wilde's characteristic contention that there never would be any real drama in England until it is recognized that a play is as personal and individual a form of self-expression as a poem or a picture. Here Wilde laid his finger upon his own fundamental error. By nature and by necessity, the drama is, of all the arts, the most impersonal: Victor Hugo said that dramatic art consisted in being somebody else. So supreme an individualist was Wilde that he lacked the dramatic faculty of self-detachment. He could never be anybody but himself. To Bernard Shaw, Wilde appeared as, in a certain sense, the only thorough playwright in England—because he played with everything; with wit, philosophy, drama, actor and audience, the whole theatre. The critics thought that *An Ideal Husband* was a play about a bracelet; but Wilde maintained—and not without show of reason—that they missed its entire psychology: "The difference in the way in which a man loves a woman from that in which a woman loves a man; the passion that women have for making ideals (which is their weakness), and the weakness of a man who dares not show his imperfections to the thing he loves." They did not miss Wilde's besetting sin, however: manu-

facturing the great majority of his characters, as talkers, in the image and superscription of Wilde. It is little short of astounding that Wilde's comedies are resplendent by reason of qualities which have no intrinsic or organic relation to dramatic art.

*The Importance of Being Earnest* is Wilde's nearest approach to the creation of an unique *genre*. It is characteristic of Wilde that his most important comedy was cast in the most frivolous form. Perhaps additional testimony to its value and essential novelty is found in the fact that German critics, notably Hagemann, deceived by its extravagant plot, branded it as of no value! Its point of departure is the titular pun; but its real purpose could not have been better expressed than in the sub-title: "A Trivial Comedy for Serious People." Though Wilde, rather suggestively, chose to designate it on one occasion as a "rose-colored comedy," the truth is that it is an epigrammatic extravaganza, cast in the form of farce. Meredith's "oblique ray" floods it throughout, and the action proceeds to the humanely malign accompaniment of "volleys of silvery laughter." Based on the absurd complications arising from the endless employment of *aliases* and written in the light, French style, this play is actually social satire on the fantastic plane. Like Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*, it is psychological farce; and the characters, to borrow a phrase of Mr. Huneker's, indulge in "psychical antics." Its

congeners are Gilbert's *Engaged*, Shaw's *The Philanderer*, and Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton*. Mr. St. John Hankin has pertinently remarked that the type of play Wilde struck out in *The Importance of Being Earnest* was the only quite original thing he contributed to the English stage—in which view he has been supported by the German, Alfred Kerr. Among German critics, Hermann Bahr is noteworthy in refusing to consider Wilde as fundamentally frivolous, maintaining that his paradoxes rest upon a profound insight into humanity. "Wilde says serious and often sad things that convulse us with merriment, not because he is not 'deep,' but precisely because he is deeper than seriousness and sadness, and has recognized their nullity." Wilde always affirmed that he respected life too deeply ever to discuss it seriously. Illuminating—almost prophetic!—is Shaw's characterization of Wilde, evoked by this play on its original production:

"Ireland is, of all countries, the most foreign to England, and to the Irishman (and Mr. Wilde is almost as acutely Irish as the Iron Duke of Wellington), there is nothing in the world quite so exquisitely comic as an Englishman's seriousness. It becomes tragic, perhaps, when the Englishman acts on it; but that occurs too seldom to be taken into account, a fact which intensifies the humor of the situation, the total result being the Englishman utterly unconscious of his real self, Mr. Wilde keenly

observant of it, and playing on the self-unconsciousness with irresistible humor, and finally, of course, the Englishman annoyed with himself for being amused at his own expense, and for being unable to convict Mr. Wilde of what seems an obvious misunderstanding of human nature. He is shocked, too, at the danger to the foundations of society when seriousness is publicly laughed at. And to complete the oddity of the situation, Mr. Wilde, touching what he himself reverences, is absolutely the most sentimental dramatist of the day."

#### IV

The comedies of Oscar Wilde stem not from the Ibsen of *Love's Comedy*, but from the Dumas fils of *Francillon*, the Sardou of *Divorçons*, and the Sheridan of *The School for Scandal*. Nor are they lacking in that *grain de folie* which was the sign manual of Meilhac and Halévy, of Gilbert and Sullivan. In verve, *esprit* and brilliance Wilde is close akin to his compatriot and fellow townsman, Bernard Shaw; in both we find a defiant individualism, a genius for epigrammatic formulation of the truth, and a vein of piquant and social satire. Inferior to Shaw in most respects, Wilde surpasses him in two features: the sensitiveness of his taste, and the re-

markable social ease of his dialogue. As an artist Wilde was generously endowed with the discretion which Henry James aptly terms the "conscience of taste;" and, unlike Shaw, he was even more intent upon amusement than upon instruction. To attempt analysis of Wilde's comedies were as profitless as to inquire into the composition of a *soufflée* or the ingredients of a Roman Candle. It is enough that he translates us into *le monde ou l'on ne s'ennuie pas*. Why carp because Wilde's theatric devices are as superficial as those of Scribe, his sentimentality as mawkish as that of Sydney Grundy, and his moralizing as ghastly a misfit as the *Mea Culpa* of a Dowson or the confessional of a Verlaine!

The phenomenal popularity of Wilde's comedies in an epoch of culture peculiarly marked by the *stigmata* of naturalism is significant testimony to their rare quality of *divertissement*. In the category of the great drama of the day *qua* drama—Ibsen, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Hervieu, Strindberg—they have no place, in that in no ultimate sense are they conditioned by the fundamental laws of the drama. They are deficient in final portraiture of character, the play and interplay of really vital emotions, and the indispensable conflict of wills and passions without which drama is mere sound and fury signifying nothing. Bernard Shaw pronounced Wilde the arch-artist: he was so colossally lazy. Idle and luxurious as an æsthetic *fainéant*, Wilde

was incapable of sustained and laborious pre-occupation with his art work. It was true, though sounding like the vainest of poses, that even when his life was most free from business cares he never had, as he put it, either the time or the leisure for his art. In the deepest sense, he lacked what Walter Pater called the responsibility of the artist to his material; although this is not to say that he failed to recognize, from the standpoint of *style*, the beauty of the material he employed, and to use that beauty as a factor in producing the æsthetic effect. Like Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, he sought to put into practice the theory that "life itself is an art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it." And the great drama of his life, as he confessed to André Gide, was that he had given his genius to his life, to his work only his talent.

There is no term which so perfectly expresses the tone of Wilde's comedies as *nonchalance*. The astounding thing is that, in his sincere effort to amuse the public, he best succeeded with the public by holding it up to scorn and ridicule with the lightest satire. "If we are to deliver a philosophy," says Mr. Chesterton, in speaking of contemporary life, "it must be in the manner of the late Mr. Whistler and the *ridentem dicere verum*.) If our heart is to be aimed at, it must be with the rapier of Stevenson, which runs through without either pain or puncture." If our brain is to be aroused, he might

have added, it must be with the scintillating paradox and enlivening epigram of Oscar Wilde. Horace Walpole once said that the world is a comedy for the man of thought, a tragedy for the man of feeling. He forgot to say that it is a farce for the man of wit. It was Wilde's creed that ironic imitation of the contrasts, absurdities, and inconsistencies of life, its fads and fancies, its quips and cranks, its follies and foibles, give far more pleasure and amusement than faithful portraiture of the dignity of life, its seriousness and profundity, its tragedy, pity, and terror. His comedies are marked, not by consistency in the characters, continuity of purpose, or unity of action, but only by persistence of the satiric vein and prevalence of the comic mood. Like Flaubert, Wilde gloried in demoralizing the public, and he denied with his every breath Sidney Lanier's dictum that art has no enemy so unrelenting as cleverness. His whole literary career was one long, defiant challenge to Zola's pronunciamiento: *l'homme de génie n'a jamais d'esprit*.

While the dialogue of Wilde's comedies, as the brilliant Hermann Bahr has said, contains more verve and *esprit* than all the French, German, and Italian comedies of to-day put together, nevertheless our taste is outraged because Wilde makes no effort to paint character, and employs a conventional and time-worn technique. Wilde's figures are lacking in vitality and humanity; it is impossible to be-



lieve in their existence. They are mere mouthpieces for the diverting ratiocinations of their author, often appearing less as personalities than as personified customs, embodied prejudices and conventions of English social life. By means of these pallid figures, Wilde has at least admirably succeeded in interpreting certain sides of the English national character. The form of his comedies approximates to that of the best French farces, but his humor has the genuine British note. There is no escaping the impression, however, that his characters are automata and puppets—masks which barely suffice to conceal the lineaments of Wilde. Here we see the *raisonneur* much as we find him in Dumas *filis*, or in Sudermann. It is in this way that Wilde identifies his characters, not with their prototypes in actual life, but with himself.

As Bernard Shaw may be said to have invented the drama of dialectic, so Oscar Wilde may be said to have invented the drama of conversation. X

In 1891 Walter Pater wrote: "There is always something of an excellent talker about the writings of Mr. Oscar Wilde; and in his hands, as happens so rarely with those who practise it, the form of dialogue is justified by its being really alive. His genial laughter-loving sense of life and its enjoyable intercourse goes far to obviate any crudity that may be in the paradox, with which, as with the bright and shining truth which often underlies it, Mr.

Wilde startling his 'countrymen' carries on, more perhaps than any other, the brilliant critical work of Matthew Arnold." This characterization is the very truth itself.

Jean-Joseph Renaud and Henri de Régnier have paid eloquent tributes to Wilde as a master of the *causerie*. A great lady once said of him: "When he is speaking, I see round his head a luminous aureole." The mere exaggeration of the phrase is testimony to Wilde's *maestria* in utterance of golden words. His inventive and imaginative faculty was inexhaustible; and for hours at a time he could recite poems in prose, indulge in a riot of paradox and epigram, or descant with miraculous and exquisite eloquence upon painting, literature, art, and—above all—upon life. Like the Japanese painters, Hokusai and Hokkei, Wilde was an artist in the little; and his art found room for expansion only in the microcosm. He was a slave to the Scheherazade of his fancy, and unsparingly lavish in the largess of his wit. He realized that he was a past-master in the gentle art of making conversation, and he nonchalantly ignored Goethe's precept: "Bilde, Künstler, rede nicht!" The result is, that he does not construct, he only sets off a mine. His art is the expression of his enjoyment of verbal pyrotechnics. The height of his pleasure was *épater le bourgeois*. The result in his comedies, while vastly diverting, is deplorable from the standpoint of

dramatic art. For the conversations are disjointed, and, in the dramatic sense, incoherent, in that they live only for the moment, and not at all for the sake of elucidation and propulsion of the dramatic process. The comparison with Shaw in this particular immediately suggests itself; but the fundamental distinction consists in the fact that whereas in Shaw's comedies the conversation, witty and epigrammatic to a degree, is strictly germane to the action, with Wilde the conversation, with all its sparkling brilliancy, is in fact subsidiary and beside the mark. As Hagemann has said, in Wilde's comedies the accent and stress is thrown wholly upon the epigrammatic content of the dialogue.

At bottom and in essence, Wilde is a master in the art of selection. He is eminently successful in giving the most diverting character to our moments as they pass. His art is the apotheosis of the moment. What may not be said, he once asked, for the moment and the "moment's monument"? Art itself, he averred, is "really a form of exaggeration, and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis." Wilde was a painter, a Neo-Impressionist. From the palette of his observation, which bore all the radiant shades and colors of his temperament, he selected and laid upon the canvas many brilliant yet distinct points of color. Seen in the proper light and from the just distance, the canvas takes on the

appearance of a complete picture—quaint, unique, marvellous. It is only by taking precisely Wilde's point of view that the spectator is enabled to synthesize the isolated brilliant points into a harmonious whole. Oscar Wilde is a Pointilliste.

There is no room for doubt that Oscar Wilde was, as Nordau classed him, a pervert and a degenerate. And yet his case warrants distrust of the dictum that an artist's work and life are fundamentally indissociable. Wilde was a man, not only of multiple personality, but of manifest and disparate achievement. The style is not always the man; and the history of art and literature reveals not a few geniuses whose private life could not justly be cited in condemnation of their pictures, their poetry, or their prose. If Wilde's life were to be cited as the sole criterion of his works, then must they forever remain *res tacenda* in the republic of letters. It is indubitable that Wilde, with his frequently avowed doctrine of irresponsible individualism and Pagan insistence upon the untrammelled expansion of the Ego, gave suicidal counsel to the younger generation. He based his apostolate upon the paradox; and as he himself asserts, the paradox is always dangerous. In his search for the elusive, the evanescent, the imaginative, he found certain exquisite truths; but they were only very partial and obscure truths, embedded in a mass of charmingly phrased, yet damnably perverse, falsehood. Much of his

verse—flagrant output of what Robert Buchanan maliciously crystallized in the damning phrase, "The Fleshly School of Poetry"—is a faithful reflex of his personality and feeling, with its morbid and sensuous daydreams, its vain regrets for "barren gain and bitter loss," its unhealthy and myopic vision, its obsession with the wanton and the *macabre*. And yet, in spite not only of these things but also of the persistent reminder of alien influences, certain of his poems are lit with the divine spark and fitfully flame out with startling and disturbing lustre.

As an artist in words, as *prosateur*, Wilde was possessed of real gifts. The social ease of his paradoxes, the opulence of his imaginative style, the union of simplicity and beauty of phraseology with vague and sometimes almost meaningless gradations and shades of thought, his insight into the real meaning of art, his understanding of the "thing as in itself it really is," and his rapt glimpses of art's holy of holies—all these things, at times and at intervals, were his. His faculty of imitation was caricature refined and sublimated to an infinite degree; and, with less real comprehension of the *arcana* of art, Wilde might have been the author of a transcendent *Borrowed Plumes*. And if he himself did not actually and literally masquerade in the literary garments of other men, certainly he possessed that rare faculty, now almost a lost art,

of creeping into another's personality, temporarily shedding the husk of self, and looking out upon the world with new and alien eyes. There lies, it would seem, the secret of his genius—the faculty of creative and imaginative interpretation in its ultimate refinement. He was ever the critic as artist, never the creator in the fine frenzy of creation. It has been said of him that he knew everything; but in the last analysis his supreme fault, both as man and artist, was his arrogance and his overweening sense of superiority. Breaks down in Wilde's case—as does many another truism—the maxim: *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*.

"To be free," wrote a celebrity, "one must not conform." Wilde secured a certain sort of freedom in the drama through his refusal to conform to the laws of dramatic art. He claimed the privileges without shouldering the responsibilities of the dramatist. He imported the methods of the *causerie* into the domain of the drama, and turned the theatre into a house of mirth. Whether or no his destination was the palace of truth, certain it is that he always stopped at the half-way house. Art was the dominant note of his literary life; but it was the art of conversation, not the art of drama. His comedies, as dramas, were cheap sacrifices to the god of success. He made many delightful, many pertinent and impertinent observations upon English life, and upon life in general; but they had no spe-

cial relation to the dramatic theme he happened for the moment to have in mind.) His plays neither enlarge the mental horizon nor dilate the heart. Wilde was too self-centred an egoist ever to come into any real or vital relation with life. It was his primal distinction as artist to be consumed with a passionate love of art. It was his primal deficiency as artist to have no genuine sympathy with humanity. And although he imaged life with clearness, grace, and distinction, certain it is that he never saw life steadily, nor ever saw it whole.

Wilde called one of his plays *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In his inverted way, he aimed at teaching the world the importance of being frivolous. Only from this standpoint is it possible to appreciate, in any real sense, Wilde the comic dramatist. (Wilde is the arch enemy of boredom and ennui; we can always enjoy him in his *beau rôle* as a purveyor of amusement and a killer of time. (But we are warned by his own confession against taking Wilde, as dramatist, too seriously. "The plays are not great," he once confessed to André Gide. "I think nothing of them—but if you only knew how amusing they are!") And the author of *The Decay of Lying* added: "Most of them are the results of bets"!)





*MAURICE MAETERLINCK*

*"Indeed, it is not in the actions but in the words that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies that are truly beautiful and great; and this not solely in the words that accompany and explain the action, for there must perforce be another dialogue beside the one which is superficially necessary. And, indeed, the only words that count in the play are those that at first seemed useless, for it is therein that the essence lies. Side by side with the necessary dialogue will you almost always find another dialogue that seems superfluous; but examine it carefully, and it will be borne home to you that this is the only one that the soul can listen to profoundly, for here alone is it the soul that is being addressed."*

*Maurice Maeterlinck: The Tragical in Daily Life; from The Treasure of the Humble; p. 111.*

## MAURICE MAETERLINCK

The closing half of the nineteenth century exhibits no marvellous and immutable fixations in the sphere of consciousness. Like all the other epochs, it has been a period of flux and reflux, of ebb and flow, of mutation and transmutation. Any well-marked devolution in the forms of literary art, in the ethical and philosophical expressions of human consciousness, has been checked by countercurrents, setting contrariwise, towards light, freedom, spirituality, truth.

The keen psychologist, with his subtle analysis of the mind, the intellect, and the human heart in all its intricate and devious workings, first held the world's gaze for a space; his day is not yet done. He was succeeded by the Naturalist, the bestial image-breaker intent upon the uglification of humanity—bare of arm, merciless knife in hand, waiting to dissect with surgical precision his human victim. Then came the dilettante poco-curantists, the Japanese-like Impressionists, reproducing with pastel effects of elusive significance the outermost and sali-

ent details of life, with their suggestions of depths and abysms of thought and feeling. Here was change in literary art ideals; but was it a progression or a retrogression? Realism was followed by its bastard progeny, Naturalism, to be followed in its turn by Realism's remotest of artistic relations, Impressionism. Psychology is replaced by physiology, and subsequently by photography; there is devolution here, and the devolution is from the actual to the artificial—mind, body, integument.

Just as, in the physical world, to every action corresponds a reaction, so may we expect the law of tidal ebb and flow in the sphere of literary phenomena. Edmond Rostand arose in France with romance as his watchword. Forthwith the French world forsook Zolaism and crowned Rostand with the laurels of genius. Stephen Phillips in England, a shining apparition in a gray world of naturalism, only accentuated the swing of the pendulum away from the pseudo-social and fundamentally prevaricative drama of Pinero. A generation sated with honeyed sentiment, flabby opinions and pointless pruriency, sits up with renewed vigor to listen to the provocative quips, the merciless wit, the sovereign satire of Bernard Shaw. Maurice Maeterlinck, at the very crest of the wave of reaction, marks the return from the coarse and the artificial to the spiritual and the true. He turns from the realism of Hauptmann and Sudermann to the mysticism of

Marcus Aurelius, Ruysbroeck, Novalis, and Thomas à Kempis; from the naturalism of Zola and D'Annunzio to the supernaturalism of Guy de Maupassant and Edgar Allan Poe.

Individualism is the most resonant note in the symphony of modern thought; and individualism and reaction in philosophy rang out the dying years of the last century. To-day the three names that are emblazoned on the oriflamme of Revolt are Friedrich Nietzsche, Henrik Ibsen, and Maurice Maeterlinck. Their supreme distinction is modernity—in art, in vitality of thought, in form of expression. Each in his particular sphere, they represent what Nietzsche has called the link between Man and Superman, between Man as he is and Man as they would have him to be. Under their guidance man may be enabled to “rise above himself to himself and cloudlessly to smile.” They represent the restless, throbbing, unquiet spirit of the age. If they stand forth for anything, it is as apostles of regeneration—the physical, mental and spiritual regeneration of the individual. Individualism, enfranchisement, freedom, is the message they are bringing to the world to aid the individual in his struggle towards a more perfect and ideal type. Each one soars over the most novel spheres of thought, truth's red torch aflame within his brain. It is by that ruddy and clarifying light that we shall see our way clearly. Stockmann, Monna Vanna,

and Zarathustra mutely attest humanity's struggle towards the light.

Advancing along strikingly distinct paths and unique each in his view of life, nevertheless these three men—Nietzsche, Ibsen, Maeterlinck—in reality are following radiating lines which converge towards some far distant point. They follow the so-called parallel lines of human endeavor which are said to meet at some Utopian infinity. In his millennial philosophy of the *Uebermensch*, the late Friedrich Nietzsche—poet, philosopher, and prophet—symbolizes the reaction of dynamism from the mechanism of Darwin, of radiant individualism from the self-effacing altruism of Tolstoi, of aristocratic anarchy against the levelism of the age. The divinity of Nietzsche's rhapsody is not a subject for Bertillon or Lombroso, but the "roaming, blond animal," created through the felicitous conjunction of man's cunning and Nature's process. The development of the individual, his supreme exaltation, the cultivation of the most strenuous physical type—thus spake Zarathustra.

Henrik Ibsen flung his bold defiance in the teeth of modern society in his dramas of revolt. That trenchant sentence, "The majority is always wrong," seems to sum up his message to humanity. He has taught the final efficacy and supremacy of will; but with marvellous sanity, his doctrine involves the salutary concessions that "submission is

the base of perfection." He stands out in grim aloofness, as the soul's captain, the apostle of individual freedom—freedom of choice, freedom to live one's own life, freedom from the false conventions and trammels of society. He has etched his own personality into the century's page with the corrosive acid of his mordant irony.

Maurice Maeterlinck—poet, mystic, transcendentalist—comes with gentle words of wise and aspiring sincerity to impress upon the world the belief that the development and disclosure of the human soul is the ultimate aim and goal of existence. Marking the spiritual reaction from Zolaism, with all its blatant bestiality, he seeks to realize the infinite, to know the unknowable, to express the inexpressible. "Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt!" is his eternal prayer. He is individualistic in the sense that he is unique and essentially modern, not explainable as a product of the age, but rather as a reactionary, hostile to all its materialistic tendencies. He heralds the dawn of a spiritual renaissance.

## I

Maeterlinck's first little volume of lyrics, *Serres Chaudes*, expressive of his initial manner, most completely identifies him with that band of poets and

mystics in France known as the Symbolists. There is no greater mistake than that of supposing that the wide hearing he has gained is attributable to the peculiar eccentricities of his style, the novelties in literary form he has employed, or the seeming inanities or solemn mystifications of his poetry. At first there was about him a trace of the *fumisterie*, that air of solemn shamming, which has helped to make the Parisian "Cymbalists" (as Verlaine loved to call them), a jest and a mockery. Perhaps he first caught the most obvious tricks of his style, those very idiosyncrasies his own fine instinct has since taught him to discard, from the school of Mallarmé, Vielé-Griffin and Régnier. Yet the Ollendorffian puerilities, the reiterant ejaculations, the hyperethereal imaginings of the Symbolist manner, are the symptoms of a tentative talent, not of an authoritative art.

Symbolism—the casting of the immaterial thought into the material mould of speech, to use the word in a broad connotation—marks the correspondence between the outward visible sign and the inward spiritual idea. One must distinguish with the greatest care between the Symbolism of the French school and that of Ibsen, of Hauptmann, or of D'Annunzio. The point of departure for the art of the French Symbolists was the effort, by tricks of sound and rhythm, of figure and image, by allusion and suggestion, to cast a languorous spell over the read-



er, evoking rare and fleeting emotions, producing strange and indefinable impressions. As Henri de Régnier expresses it: "It is the function of the poet to express his own emotions. He realizes that his ideas are beautiful. He would convey them to the reader as they are. It is then that the power of common speech forces him to place known words in uncommon sequence or to resurrect an archaism that his idea may be better expressed. He is in no sense an analyst of the emotions but an artist, pure and simple; his function is not with life and nature, but with the imagination." A symbolist in this sense is an artist who finds the words at his command inadequate clearly to express his emotions, and is therefore compelled to employ words as symbols, deeply suggestive in their meaning. It is apparent that, with the symbolists, the simplest words, the homeliest figures, may take on untold significance. The poetry of the symbolists is characterized by peculiar, haunting and elusive beauty and destined for the profoundest suggestiveness; but quite too often, it must be confessed, conveying no meaning at all to anyone save to the initiated devotee.

To compare Maeterlinck's early poems with the "unrhymed, loose rhythmic prose" of Walt Whitman is to make a perfectly obvious and yet at the same time perfectly irrelevant criticism. While both are disjointed, formless, enumerative, Maeterlinck's

every line is charged with a certain vague significance, suggestive of subtle and ever subtler possibilities of interest. There is something in it of the dim and haunting fancies of Poe, of the puerile vaporings of Arthur Rimbaud. Take a passage from *Serres Chaudes* like the following:

“O hothouse in the midst of the forests!  
And your doors shut forever!  
And all that there is under your dome,  
And under my soul in your likeness!  
The thoughts of a princess an-hungered,  
The weariness of a sailor in the wilderness,  
Brazen music at the windows of incurables.”

Is this pompous mystification or profound poetry? Is it sense? As Bernard Shaw would say: “Is it right, is it proper, is it decent?” And yet the morbid mind of the isolated child of modernity sighs and frets through it all: he is excluded by very reason of his supersensitive, exotic, orchidaceous soul from spontaneous and untrammelled communication with nature. Witness the poignant image of the princess, born in affluence and bred in the lap of luxury, suffering the unimagined pangs of hunger. The isolation and hopeless sense of desertion are accentuated by the figure of the sailor, longing for the cool waves and bracing salt breezes of health, as he wanders with parched throat over the hot sand of the endless desert. What more eloquent, what

more laconically modern symbol than that of the military band passing under the windows of a hospital for incurables! Lonely souls, obsessed with world-weariness, harassed with morbid self-distrust and uncertain of a goal; these are sketchily bodied forth with the ruthless, the mystifying laconism of the Flemish mystic.

As an illustration of the beauty and finish and simplicity of Maeterlinck's art as a poet, at its highest and least symbolical pitch, may be cited Richard Hovey's translation of Maeterlinck's unnamed poem:

"And if some day he come back  
What shall he be told?  
Tell him that I waited,  
Till my heart was cold.

And if he ask me yet again,  
Not recognizing me,  
Speak him fair and sisterly,  
His heart breaks, maybe.

And if he asks me where you are,  
What shall I reply?  
Give him my golden ring  
And make no reply.

And if he should ask me  
Why the hall is left desolate?  
Show him the unlit lamp,  
And point to the open gate.

And if he should ask me  
How you fell asleep?  
Tell him that I smiled,  
For fear lest he should weep."

## II

M. Maeterlinck owes his great reputation, not to faddism, to decadentism, or to symbolism. He is admired because he is the sincerest of literary artists, because he is ever striving for that Truth which is Beauty. His poetry, even when vaguest and most mysterious in its strangely symbolic vesture, leaves always upon the mind, or rather upon the senses, an ineffaceable impression of peculiar and unusual beauty. He cannot be said to have created any great, distinctive, or strikingly modern form of prose writing. Still his prose wears a gentle simplicity, a quiet impressiveness, and a pensive appeal that charms one when the fulminations of the blatant rhetorician, the vaporings of the phantasmagoric imagination, tire the senses, or the polished periods of the faultless *prosateur* leave one cold and unmoved. Such a book as *Wisdom and Destiny*—a book that may truly be called noble—marks a distinct epoch in spiritual and cosmic evolution. The calm philosophy of Marcus Aurelius; the longings after the Infinite, if haply they may

find it, of the fourteenth century mystic, Ruysbroeck the admirable, and the gentle Novalis; the transcendentalism of the Greek spirit in our own literature, Emerson; the "second sphere," the realm of unconscious revelation of the Ibsen of *The Lady from the Sea* and *The Master Builder*; the brooding mysticism of the Shakspeare of *Hamlet*—these and other inspiring influences mingle with and color Maeterlinck's own conception of *la vie intérieure*. If, in Maeterlinck's interpretation of the world-riddle, there is one charm more fascinating than another, it is his disinterested search for truth. He is never didactic, never even definitive in any ultimate sense. Quite often he is actually found contradicting himself, consciously doing so, in the hope of retracing his steps a little way, aided by the faint glimmer of some new light, until he enter once more the straight path to his goal. His books show that, in a sense rightly understood, he is a scientific worker, difficult as this is to reconcile with the vagueness and groping insecurity of his mysticism. From the evidence of his books, M. Maeterlinck has studied the modern theories of auto-suggestion, hypnotism, telepathy, psychology, and psychic phenomena. No reader of *The Life of the Bee* can doubt that M. Maeterlinck is a scientific worker, although this exquisite social history is the work of an artist and a *littérateur* as well as of a scientist. His works—poetry, prose, drama—all evidence his close study

and deep comprehension of modern scientific theories, especially of a psychic or psychologic character, and these works evidence it concretely and suggestively, but more often by mere implication.

It would be a serious mistake to imagine M. Maeterlinck to be the mere mouthpiece of the mystics of other years. It is not to be doubted that his mysticism is based upon a long and loving acquaintance with the greatest mystics of the past. To find standards of comparison for a phenomenon like the rare mind of this new-century mystic, we have to seek, not in our own, but in another age. A comparison of M. Maeterlinck's philosophy with that of the mystics of the past shows similarity in fundamentals to exist between them. But to say that M. Maeterlinck follows Ruysbroeck here or Novalis there, is not an easy matter: with other mystics M. Maeterlinck has in common only mysticism. The point of vantage from which he views the world, the eyes with which he sees it, the transmuting mind, are all his own. Nor has he studied modern science—that of the body, the organism, that of the mind, the intelligence, that of the soul, the higher emotions—only to be thrown back upon himself in disappointment, disillusionment and despair. Rather, as someone has recently said: "There is evidence that his mysticism is not so much a refuge from the tyranny of scientific naturalism as the deliberate choice of a man who finds in it confirmations of

countless hopes and suspicions science herself raised within him."

### III

Much has been said in praise of the technique of Maeterlinck's first little no-plot plays—laudatory classification of them as forms of art absolutely new under the sun. Maeterlinck was intimately familiar with the cognate work of his countryman, Charles van Lerberghe; and to Maeterlinck, as to Baudelaire, Poe was the master. The art-form of which Maeterlinck's no-plot plays are mere dramatic transpositions is virtually a creation of the nineteenth century; and, with all their bizarre novelty, these little plays appear as little else, technically, than Short-stories cast in the dramatic mould. The Short-story, as formulated by Professor Brander Matthews, must always convey essential unity of impression—or, as Poe phrased it, a totality of effect. Intensive, cumulative force is the most significant of the *differentiæ* of this art-form; and no one has ever succeeded as a writer of Short-stories who had not ingenuity, originality, the faculty of compression, and, in many instances, the touch of fantasy. As an example of Maeterlinck's early manner in the drama, consider, for example, that wonderfully convincing study in hallucination, Maeterlinck's *L'In-*

*truse*—the most striking, awe-compelling, and, withal, most original of his no-plot plays.

The grandfather, blind and helpless, is seated in his arm-chair, with his three granddaughters around him. The old man's beloved daughter has given birth to a child, and lies ill in the inner chamber. The atmosphere is pregnant with catastrophe, the senses are chilled by the prevision of impending misfortune. Overbrooded by anticipant foreboding, the grandfather subconsciously feels the approach of death. His senses, subtle and acute beyond their wont,—from his blindness, perhaps—give him unmistakable warning. The gradual approach of some unseen being, the fright of the swans, the sudden hush of nature, the sound as of the sharpening of a scythe, the ghostly creaking of the house door, the noise of footsteps on the stair, the fitful gleams and sudden extinguishing of the lamp—the significance of all these signs and portents is divined by the blind old grandfather alone. When finally someone is heard to rise in the pitchy blackness of the sitting-room, the old man shudders with peculiar horror. The door of the inner chamber opens, and a Sister of Charity mutely announces by a sign that his daughter is dead. The Intruder has at last gained admittance.

This little play, the dramatic production of which the late Richard Hovey confessed made an ineffaceable impression upon his consciousness, bears the



clearest stamp of unity of impression, of totality of effect. The keynote of its mood is cumulative dread; while ingenuity and originality are displayed in every line of the conception. The art which well-nigh makes the impalpable invade the realm of the tangible, the supernatural to place one foot over the border line of the natural, attains here to something very like perfection. Fantasy fills every interstice of the play. In *L'Intruse* as a psychic concept, a deep and penetrating insight into subjective states of mind in direct correspondence with movements in the supernatural world is revealed. It is not so much that Maeterlinck has created a new shiver, to quote Hugo on Baudelaire, as that he has evoked a shiver in a novel and startling way.

*L'Intruse* was chosen as an illustration of the dramatized Short-story because it excels all the other no-plot dramas in power and inevitableness. Perhaps *Les Aveugles*, because of the quiescence and paralyzed initiative of the groping blind men, and because, too, its conclusion is not "short, sharp, and shocking," comes nearer to a Sketch cast in dramatic form than a dramatized Short-story; but certainly *Les Sept Princesses* and *L'Intérieur* are examples of the latter form as clearly as is *L'Intruse*. The artistic kinship of Maeterlinck with Maupassant and Poe becomes all the more patent when we recognize Maeterlinck's no-plot dramas not only as occult studies in hallucination but as dramatized

versions of the perfected art-form of these masters of the Short-story.

#### IV

It is the fundamental faith of M. Maeterlinck that the theatre of to-day needs reorganization and reformation in order to conform to the subtler demands of the higher and more complex life of our epoch. The theatre, he affirms, has for its supreme mission the revelation of infinity, and of the grandeur as well as the secret beauty of life. He would have a theatre in accordance with modern psychic demands, giving a revelation of what the Parisian mystic Schuré calls the *abîmes* and *profondeurs* of the soul. Carlyle also pleaded for a recognition of what he called in his own speech the Eternities and the Immensities. M. Maeterlinck would bring the inner life of the soul closer to us; he would push the actors further off. Thus he regrets that he has ever seen *Hamlet* performed on the stage, since it robbed him of his own conception of its mystic significance. The actor, the spectre of an actor, dethroned his own image of the real Hamlet. From the printed page starts forth the old Hamlet of his dreams never again.

His regret is for the loss of the "second sphere," that subconscious realm where soul speaks to soul

without the intermediary of words. He hails the coming of the Renaissance of Wonder, the mystic epoch when men shall penetrate deep into the soil of their subliminal selves. The age, which, as Phillips Brooks once said, "stands off and looks at itself"—that age Maeterlinck heralds and summons. Ibsen, too, has dreamed of this dawning day: Julian perhaps in the end caught some faint prevision of the "third kingdom."

Silence is the pall that hangs over the earlier plays of Maeterlinck; the characters themselves are quiescent and immobile. It is only in silence that we can really know each other—in the fugitive look, the chance meeting, the sudden hand-clasp. Only in such moments do we truly come to know anything that is worth knowing. Half conscious of his deep-rooted faith in the meaning of presentiments, the significance of sub-conscious revelations, M. Maeterlinck wrote a number of plays surcharged with the impalpable and imponderable weight of pathos and groping nescience. "The keynote of these little plays," he once wrote, "is dread of the unknown that surrounds us. I, or rather some obscure poetical feeling within me (for with the sincerest of the poets a division must often be made between the instinctive feeling of their art and the thoughts of their real life), seemed to believe in a species of monstrous, invisible, fatal power that gave heed to our every action, and was hostile to our smile, to

our life, to our peace and our love. Its intentions could not be divined, but the spirit of the drama assumed them to be malevolent always. In its essence, perhaps, this power was just, but only in anger; and it exercised justice in a manner so crooked, so secret, so sluggish and remote, that its punishments—for rewards there were never—took the semblance of inexplicable, arbitrary acts of fate. We had then more or less the idea of the God of the Christians, blent with that of fatality of old, lurking in nature's impenetrable twilight, whence it eagerly watched, contested, and saddened the projects, the feelings, the thoughts, and the happiness of man."

In those early plays the interest hangs upon the passage, rather than upon the victim, of fatality; our grief is not excited by the tragedy: we shudder with wide-eyed horror at the argument of the invisible, the evidence of things not seen. By the intuitive apprehensions of the soul, its instinctive groping for elective affinities, and the incomprehensible, disquieting movements in nature in sympathetic attune with dark forebodings of dumb, shadowy events—by these means M. Maeterlinck made us aware of the adumbration, the gradual approach, and ultimate presence of the mysterious forces of Fate, Terror, and Death. He objectified and concretized for us those moments of life.

"When . . . . .  
In some nimble interchange of thought  
The silence enters and the talkers stare."

The unnamed presence was always Death—Death the Intruder. In *L'Intruse* we waited with tense expectancy and strained senses for his coming; in *L'Intérieur* we accompanied him to the scene of the eternal tragedy; in *Les Aveugles* we awaken with a start to find Death in our very midst. Terror lurks behind a half-closed door, and all the poignant mystery of the universe seems embodied in the figures of seven princesses sleeping in a dim castle beside the sounding sea. There was no escape from the obsession of some dire, inexpressibly dreadful unknown presence. "This unknown," M. Maeterlinck himself has said, "would most frequently appear in the shape of death. The presence of death—infinite, menacing, forever treacherously active—filled every interstice of the poem. The problem of existence was answered only by the enigma of annihilation. And it was a callous, inexorable death; blind, and groping its mysterious way with only chance to guide it; laying its hands preferentially on the youngest and least unhappy, for that those held themselves less motionless than others, and that every too sudden movement in the night arrested its attention. And round it were

only poor, little, trembling, elementary creatures, who shivered for an instant and wept, on the brink of a gulf; and their words and their tears had importance only from the fact that each word they spoke and each tear they shed fell into this gulf, and resounded therein so strangely at times as to lead one to think that the gulf must be vast if tear or word, as it fell, could send forth so confused and muffled a sound."

A time came in M. Maeterlinck's career when he recognized the morbidity and unhealthiness of such a view of life, and realized that, in the transition, he had come out "on the other side of good and evil." This conception of life may be truth, he grants, but it is "one of those profound but sterile truths which the poet may salute as he passes on his way"; with it he should not abide. It is perhaps this early conception which led him to avow that he had written these plays for a theatre of marionettes. The characters all silently and unresistingly do the bidding of some unseen, unknown power. Duse said of Maeterlinck: "He gives you only figures in a mist—children and spirits." Even that "savage little legend" of the misfortunes of Maleine, M. Maeterlinck's first play, with all its violence, lust, bloodshed, tears and terror, is overbrooded by haunting and inexpressible misery.

With fatal exaggeration, Octave Mirabeau wrote

of this play: "*M. Maurice Maeterlinck nous a donné l'œuvre la plus géniale de ce temps, et la plus extraordinaire et la plus naïve aussi, comparable et —oserai-je dire?—supérieure en beauté à ce qu'il y a de plus beau dans Shakspeare . . . plus tragique que Macbeth, plus extraordinaire en pensée que Hamlet.*" Plus, plus, and again plus! Bernard Shaw delightedly, though unjustly, accused even the precise and careful Archer of conferring the "Order of the Swan" (the Swan of Avon) upon Maeterlinck.

There are many suggestions of Shakspearean characters in this little play—Hamlet, Ophelia, Juliet, Lear, the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Lady Macbeth; one rather feels, however, that the author of this play is in no sense a "Belgian Shakspeare," but instead a rather morbid and immature young man, reinterpreting and rehandling the plots and personages of the master-poet, in the effort to express himself and his faith in terms of the psychic chirography of today. *Maleine* is full of the unnamed terrors of the Poe of *The House of Usher*, of ghost-haunted regions, of dark, pestilential tarns—the Poe of *Ulalume* and *The Haunted Palace*. It is not until M. Maeterlinck's second, or rather third, period is reached that his theories find plausibly human concretizations.

## V

The late Richard Hovey once spoke of Maeterlinck as "the greatest living poet of love, if not the greatest poet of love that ever lived." The Maeterlinck of the second manner we recognize as essentially the celebrant and interpreter of Love.

In *Pelléas and Mélisande* we have a play of conventional plot—a modern revision of the Da Rimini story of Dante—yet in Maeterlinck's play there is no such thing as *couleur locale*, no trace of Italy, for example, no suggestion of the thirteenth century. So distant is the *milieu*, so fanciful is the setting—a pathetic love-story projected against a gloomy background of old, forgotten castles—that we might almost think of it as taking place out of space and time. It is typical of the plays of this period, peopled with princes and princesses from No-Man's Land, named after the characters in the *Morte d'Arthur*, striking stained-glass attitudes of pre-Raphaelite grace; old men, symbolic of experience, wisdom, abstract justice; blind beggars, intoning the song of the world-malady; little wise children, whose instinctive divination gives new veracity to the words *ex oris infantium* . . . There are castles in the depths of haunted forests, fountains playing softly



in the misty moonshine of secret gardens, where errant princesses lose their golden crowns in magic pools, or their wedding-rings in caverns echoing with the murmur of the sea. These are pictures in which may faintly be traced the lineaments of humanity; but the figures are dim and confused, more abstract than vital. In *Pelléas and Mélisande* the accent is everywhere raised from off the human characters and the stress thrown upon forces of a supersensible dreamland, beyond the frontier of the natural. Throughout every scene, in almost every speech, there lurks a hidden meaning, so suggestive, so elusive, so profound, that the unembodied forces of another world seem to adumbrate and control the destinies of humanity. Mélisande is a child-princess, wedded through no will of her own to the gaunt, rugged, silent Golaud. As soon as Mélisande and the young and handsome Pelléas, Golaud's half-brother, meet, their mutual insight tells them that they are destined for each other. Struggle as they will against fate, its coils are too strong for them and they succumb to the inevitable call of soul to soul. Through the little Yniold, his son by a former marriage, Golaud learns of Mélisande's infidelity, surprises the lovers in each other's arms, strikes Pelléas dead, and gives Mélisande a mortal wound.

Throughout the whole play there breathes an atmosphere of the most profound symbolism. Even the simplest acts, the merest words of all the char-

acters, are charged and freighted with symbolic meaning. The beautiful balcony episode, suggestive as it may be of *Romeo and Juliet*, is not only cast in exquisite poetic form, but is animate with tragic significance. The incident of the flight of Mélisande's doves, the fluttering of her hair to her lover's lips, the loss of the wedding-ring, the cavern scene, and the clandestine meetings beyond the walls of the castle loom large with hidden import. Nowhere is the novel dramatic method of M. Maeterlinck more manifest than in this play, in that he causes nature in its faintest movement to coöperate with the thoughts and deeds of the characters in suggesting the overshadowing dominance of the divinity which shapes our ends.

As presented by a wholly French cast at Covent Garden, London, in the season of 1910, Debussy's opera of *Pelléas and Mélisande* seemed to me a marvel of matchless beauty, of sight and of sound. The eery strains of this strange music seemed magically devised to express the fateful sadness of Maeterlinck's poem. The characters, uttering their dolorous complaints with the delicate nasality of the Gallic *timbre*, move as if in a dream through the exquisite scenes of their predestined fate—with a hopelessness, a sad sense of imminent misfortune incomparably poetic and tragic. Such collaboration is a miracle of art: Maeterlinck himself seemed to have passed into the soul of Debussy and to have inspired

him. An even more memorable performance—if such be possible!—was given in the latter part of August, 1910, at M. Maeterlinck's own home, the ancient Abbey of St. Wandrille. The changing scenes of this romantic play, with its antique setting, were all found in the Abbey itself and its environs. The few rapt spectators took their pre-arranged places of vantage and spied, like eavesdroppers, upon forlorn little Mélisande weeping in the forest over the loss of her golden crown; upon Golaud riding up to the castle gates on his white charger, joyously bearing his young bride in his arms; upon Pelléas and Mélisande engaging in gentle converse, now in the stillness of the lime trees, now beside the splashing waters of the fountain; upon the prophetic bedside scene when Golaud discovers the loss of Mélisande's betrothal ring; upon the tower scene where Pelléas bathes in the beauty of Mélisande's hair; upon the final tragic scenes of suspicion, surprised love, assassination, and death. With such artists as M. René Maupré, M. Jean Durozat, M. Severin-Mars, Mme. Leblanc, Mlle. Jeanne Even, and Mlle. Gilberte Livettini, with such a setting as the Abbey of Saint Wandrille, Maeterlinck's beautiful drama had a marvellous rendition that bids fair to remain unsurpassed in the history of the production of his plays.

In all Maeterlinck's love-dramas—*Alladine and Palomides*, *Pelléas and Mélisande*, and *Aglavaine*

and *Sélysette*—the mood is ever individualistic, symptomatic of the modern thinker. The action, simple to the verge of bareness, is but a frail framework through and beyond which we gaze into the depths of the human soul. Maeterlinck seems to throw some faint gleams of light into the dark pool where humanity has lost its golden crown. The march of events is but a passing show, life is a tiny oasis in an illimitable desert, a narrow vale between two eternities. The characters do not bring things to pass; they are set in a magic maze of tragic destinies: through them are ever sweeping the impelling forces of the universe. Action is but the *simulacrum*, emotion is eternal reality. Deeds are but the evanescent expression of the temporary, feelings are the vital repository of immortal truth.

The realities, the crises of life, are found in silence and in sadness: "*sunt lacrimæ rerum.*" Across the stage with dominant step strides no vital, tremendous, self-captained soul, incarnate with the deep-seated elements of religion and Christian morality. Love is ever the fleeting victim, wantonly broken upon the wheel of fate. The characters, one and all, solemnly acknowledge the supremacy of destiny and morally acquiesce in its decrees. The call of soul to soul cannot be disregarded: the forces of Love and Chance conspire in the tragic *dénouement*.

## VI

To M. Maeterlinck, as both his plays and essays affirm, tragedy to-day is of necessity of a different cast from the tragedy of the past. Speaking of his art, Ibsen once significantly said: "We are no longer living in the time of Shakspeare." However he may have carried his theory out, at least Gerhardt Hauptmann has said: "Action upon the stage will, I think, give way to the analysis of character and to the exhaustive consideration of the motives which prompt men to act. Passion does not move at such headlong speed as in Shakspeare's day, so that we present not the actions themselves, but the psychological states which cause them." Maeterlinck believes that the bold bloodshed and gaudy theatricism of the conventional drama of the past must be replaced by psychic suggestion and the silent conflicts of the soul in this modern day of analysis and introspection. The "character in action" of a Shakspeare will be superseded by the inverted "action in character" of a Maeterlinck. Or, to be more precise, life reveals its meaning to us only in static moments, in the passive intervals of our life. "It is no longer a violent, exceptional moment of life that passes before our eyes—it is life itself. Thou-

sands and thousands of laws there are, mightier and more venerable than those of passion . . . It is only in the twilight that they can be seen and heard, in the meditation that comes to us at the tranquil moments of life."

Maeterlinck's ideal mood is static: he would relegate the dynamic, the violent, to the ages of whose life it was the counterpart. He protests against this false anachronism which dominates the stage to such an extent that dramatic art dates back as many years as the art of sculpture. He cites modern examples of the art of painting to prove that Marius triumphing over the Cymbrians, or the assassination of the Duke of Guise, is no longer the type. The drama is no longer dependent upon the exhibition of violent convulsions of life: "Does the soul flower only on nights of storm?" It is only when man is at rest that we have time to observe him. "To me, Othello does not appear to live the august daily life of Hamlet, who has time to live, inasmuch as he does not act. Othello is admirably jealous. But is it not perhaps an ancient error to imagine that it is at the moments when this passion, or others of equal violence, possess us, that we live our true lives? I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his arm-chair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him, giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors

and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny—an old man who is conscious not that all the powers in this world, like so many heedful servants, are mingling and keeping vigil in his room, who suspects not that the very sun itself is supporting in space the little table against which he leans, or that every star in heaven and every fibre of the soul are directly concerned in the movement of an eyelid that closes or a thought that springs to birth,—I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or ‘the husband who avenges his honor.’ ”

## VII

Preoccupied ceaselessly with the “disquiet of universal mystery,” groping hesitatingly in that twilight zone which vaguely delimitates the real and intimates the over-real, Maeterlinck in his earlier fatalistic moods seemed content to narrate the legend of the human chimera with all the quiescent disingenuousness of youth. With the “grave, wide-eyed gaze of an inspired child,” observing all things *sub specie æternitatis*, Maeterlinck succeeded in diffus-

ing through this twilight zone that strange "lunar brilliance" which Heine rapturously divined at times in Shakspeare. In his symbols there is some audible, almost sensible revelation of the Infinite; in Carlyle's phrase, "the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and, as it were, attainable there." First, I think, in *Aglavaine and Sélysette* is there real descent to earth, a real adumbration of a primarily human problem. This play, along with *Sœur Béatrice* and *Ardiane et Barbe Bleu*, marks the actual transition stage in Maeterlinck's art from the drama of fatality, of pity and terror, to the drama of human interests, of real emotions, and of direct volitional activity. *Aglavaine and Sélysette* is an illuminating essay, though seen in a glass darkly, upon ideal possibilities in human relationship in a future state of elevated moral consciousness. The noble, soulful Aglavaine realizes that she loves, and is beloved by, Méléandre, already wedded to the childlike Sélysette. Through sympathetic communion with the lofty soul of Aglavaine, the little Sélysette awakes to a realization of the shallowness of her fruitless, butterfly existence. With her mate, there has been no high pilgrimage to those uplands of peace where the soul truly flowers. The unfolding, petal by petal, of this flower-like, primrose soul is intimated with an art as exquisite as it is finished. And yet there is the hampering fetter of the *menschlich allzu menschlich*: the



situation, humanly speaking, is perilous, untenable. "I love you," says Aglavaine; "I love Méléandre, Méléandre loves me, he loves you, too; you love us both, and yet we cannot live happily, because the hour has not yet come when human beings may be thus united." (Does the world offer no instances to the contrary?) With the resolution born of a hopeless certitude, Aglavaine attains the power of sincere resignation and offers to go away forever. Humanly consenting in the first glad rush of relief, Sélysette in the event attains the diviner resignation, resolutely going out into the night of despair and death that two souls, immemorally mated, may attain the foreordained consummation of their destiny.

Librettos for music—*Singspiele*, as the Germans say—, *Sœur Béatrice* and *Ardiane et Barbe Bleu* serve more clearly to mark the transition in Maeterlinck's attitude toward problems which concern the interpreter of life. In a morality of deeply human appeal, *Sœur Béatrice* is the Everywoman of human love—spontaneous, instinctive, sacrificial. Pure in intent, Béatrice flees the convent with her lover; and though externally soiled and besmirched with earthly and sensual contacts, she returns in the end to sanctuary to find that the Virgin has kept inviolate her place there—a subtly appealing vindication of the sanctity of human impulse. When the Abbess intimates that love divine is a terrible burden, Béatrice replies, "Mother, no. It is the love

of man that is the burden, the weary burden. . . . I have said often, when I was not happy, God would not punish if He once knew all. . . . In other days all folk ignored distress, in other days they cursed all those that sinned; but now all pardon, and all seem to know . . . .”

The vigilant, self-reliant Ardiane, of Maeterlinck's version of the old Blue Beard legend of a thousand transformations, is the direct progenitress of the passionate Joyzelle and the heroic Giovanna. Her intuition is sure and supreme; for though she is free to open all doors but one, it is the forbidden door alone that she seeks. “Open the others if you will; but all that is permitted us will tell us naught.” Truth lies not on the beaten path of convention, but in the secret recesses of the soul. Guilty for a moment of human yielding to the sparkling allurements of the senses, Ardiane recoils in time, defies the monster of *l'homme moyen sensual*, and releases her imprisoned sisters in captivity—only to find that they are wedded to their chains. Without too violent reference to the concrete—the vaticinations of a Mary Wollstonecraft or the violences of a Christabel Pankhurst—, it is obvious that Maeterlinck is envisaging here the present and coming revolt of woman against her subjection; and enunciating quite definitely, if delicately, satiric commentaries upon the “womanly woman.”

## VIII

The influence of much modern philosophy, of much modern drama, is unmistakable. There is a secret and abstract justice, a sphere of ethical equity, outside of and above the external domain of law, convention and authority. The arbiter of human conduct must be, not the merciless *on dit* of the world, but the mystical sense of justice deep-rooted in the consciousness of the race. To the question: Which of two forces which work within us, the one natural, the other ethical, is the more natural and necessary?, Maeterlinck would doubtless answer, according to Lorenzo Ratto, "The great ideas of humanity belong to the species, not to the individual. Justice is perhaps an instinct whose tendency is the defence and conservation of humanity. Ideal justice is innate and is transformed by reason and will into moral force. Justice is within ourselves; outside of us is infinite injustice, which may rather be called justice incomplete, because exposed to all the errors and modifications which result from clashing interests. While we are benefited by following the dictates of this inner voice, its influence cannot extend to our surroundings and modify the laws of nature. Its sole result is an

internal equilibrium, the balance of the conscience in which we may enjoy material well-being."

But how shall this human, instinctive justice, perpetually functioning within ourselves, find expression in a drama of nescience and fatalistic quietude? How shall such a drama exist in the world of spectators whose composite and aggregate passion is for character in visible action? After his long period of probative experimentalism followed by contemplation—the reverse operation to that of the pure theorist—Maeterlinck discovered and frankly acknowledged the obligation of the dramatist writing for the actual theatre of to-day. "To penetrate deeply into human consciousness", he says in *The Double Garden*, "is the privilege, even the duty of the thinker, the moralist, the historian, novelist, and, to a degree, of the lyric poet; but not of the dramatist. Whatever the temptation, he dare not sink into inactivity, become mere philosopher or observer. Do what one will, discover what marvels one may, the sovereign law of the stage, its essential demand, will always be *action*. With the rise of the curtain, the high intellectual desire within us undergoes transformation; and in place of the thinker, psychologist, mystic or moralist, there stands the mere instinctive spectator, the man electrified negatively by the crowd, the man whose one desire is to see something happen." Nowhere have I seen a more admirable and succinct formulation of the essential

criterion of true drama—unless it be Brunetière's classical positing of the struggle of human wills; and this, in the light of contemporary specimens of drama, is subject to very wide modification and re-statement. In Maeterlinck's case, it is peculiarly noteworthy that his practice accompanies the actual formulation of his hardly won discoveries.

Early in his career, Maeterlinck confessed that when he went to a theatre, he felt as though he were spending a few hours with his ancestors, who conceived life as something primitive, arid and brutal. In the dramas of the school of Dumas *filis*, he found the most elementary of moral conflicts brought on the stage—the husband avenging his honor, the promulgation of the rights of the illegitimate child, aspects of divorce, variations on the “unwritten law”, and so on. It was not until he pondered the dramas of Ibsen and his followers that he discovered that “the further we penetrate into the consciousness of man, the less struggle do we discover.” A mystic who has lost faith in the healing efficacies of revealed religion, Maeterlinck has undergone the inevitable attendant disillusion. And his calm dispassionate contemplation of the eternal enigma has fixed in his consciousness the irrevocable conviction that the great duties, faiths, obligations and responsibilities of the future will calmly, gently disengage themselves from the violent, bitter and all too human passions of to-day. “A consciousness that is

truly enlightened will possess passions and desires infinitely less exacting, infinitely more peaceful and patient, more salutary, abstract and general, than are those that reside in the ordinary consciousness." In a world of human beings, emanating justice from within and living an interior life of rare calm and benignity, only the most pressing and most universal duties will possess the power to disturb the internal equilibrium of human consciousness.

## IX

*Monna Vanna* is the summit of Maeterlinck's art as a dramatist; and *Joyzelle*, though following it in point of time, in reality is a link between *Monna Vanna* and his earlier works. Indeed, it is a sort of pendant to *Monna Vanna* and should be considered prior to and in connection with it. And I think that the theoretical considerations outlined above may serve to act as commentary upon both plays. More imaginative, poetic and symbolic than *Monna Vanna*, as Maeterlinck himself said, *Joyzelle* is far less coherent and significant, relying as it does upon such obvious symbolism. "It represents", said Maeterlinck, "the triumph of will and love over Destiny, or fatality as against the converse lesson of *Monna Vanna*." In order to illustrate the possibility

of such a result of the struggle between environment and personality, it was necessary, Maeterlinck further explained, to place the chief personages of the drama in very peculiar circumstances, and to invoke the aid of myth and symbolism. The grounds for such a necessity are clear only in the case of an artist of Maeterlinck's peculiar *timbre*; and there can be no doubt that the circumstances in which the characters are placed are decidedly "peculiar". Merlin, the old seer, knowing the future through the intermediary of his familiar spirit, Arielle—symbolic incarnation of his faculty of divination—, and realizing all that the future holds for his beloved son, determines to play the rôle of destiny in order to ensure his happiness. Joyzelle loves Lanceor, Merlin's son, with a perfectly human, instinctive passion; and acts under all the cruel and harrowing tests to which she is submitted by Merlin, with forthright decisiveness and simplicity. Maeterlinck fails to convince us that there is any real conflict—merely the successful, but foreseen, surmounting of all the tests imposed; and at the end as at the beginning, Joyzelle is identical with herself—fresh, spontaneous, loyal unto death. To win her Lanceor, she is nerved even to crime; but fate—or a mechanical symbol for fate!—intervenes. Maeterlinck loosely evades the moral implication of this incident; for when Joyzelle naïvely inquires, "Is it then ordained that love should strike and kill all that attempts to

bar the road?", the answer is, "I do not know." It is interesting to observe that Joyzelle is submitted to the same test as Vanna, with this fundamental difference: upon the consent of Vanna to a sacrifice of her person is conditioned the material happiness and the lives of thousands; Joyzelle fights for the inner sanctity of individual and personal love. Lanceor is a mere lay figure—the dupe of a Maeterlinckian *Midsummer Night's Dream*; and in the strange story of this Ferdinand and Miranda, Joyzelle is struggling for a consummation of very dubious value. The play is noteworthy in one respect, viewed in the light it throws upon the evolution of Maeterlinck's art as a dramatist. Hitherto Maeterlinck has always vouchsafed to fate the victory over humanity. In *Joyzelle*, Maeterlinck has given the victory to love—a love of authentic finality and enduring strength.

## X

Original and distinctive as Maeterlinck succeeds in being in all his tentatives and his experiments, he is perhaps the most impressionable of modern artists. The influences that work in him are lost in the mists of antiquity and find solid ground in the most modern of the moderns. If at times he seems the incarnation of the Stoicism for which we have to go



to Marcus Aurelius to find a parallel, at others he penetrates to the heart of modern problems, and challenges comparison, as moralist, even with Ibsen and Nietzsche.

Max Nordau contemptuously, though not inaptly, characterized *La Princesse Maleine* as a sort of cento out of Shakspeare, a "Shakspearean anthology for children and Patagonians." Indeed, *La Princesse Maleine*, and *Joyzelle* with its *Tempest* setting, testify to Maeterlinck's preoccupation with the scenic accessories and romantic violences of the Shakspearean drama. *Monna Vanna*, as Professor W. L. Phelps pointed out, owes its *milieu* and one of its structural features to Browning's *Luria*; and *Pelléas and Mélisande* finds its roots in the Dantean story of the two who go forever on the accursèd air. And yet, in every case, Maeterlinck's adaptation, modification, or amplification of the facts, material or spiritual, and his re-presentation of the characters he has chosen to reincarnate, reveal individuality, a distinctive habit of mind, and originality of depiction. These plays, in a sense, serve as Maeterlinck's personal impressions of his adventures among the masterpieces of Shakspeare, Browning and Dante.

The most noteworthy influence visibly operant upon the art and thought and life of Maeterlinck came however, not from literature, but from life—in the person of that woman who was eventually to

share all his joys and sorrows. *The Treasure of the Humble* was dedicated to Mlle. Georgette Leblanc; and it is significant that in the year of its publication, 1896, Maeterlinck leaves Flanders for ever and enters the great cosmopolitan world of Paris. Behind him now lie the ancient spires, the dark canals, the sluggish waters, the floating swans, the gloomy atmosphere and phlegmatic spirit of his ancestral city. Behind him lie the strange and morbid fancies of his youthful days—the arabesque landscapes, hidden grottoes, haunted castles, noxious moonlit gardens, and pitiable, bloodless spectres, making frantic gestures of despair and stammering monotonous, incoherent protests against immitigable doom. The gray Stoic dons the bright colors of optimism, the mystic yields to the humanitarian pulse of the age. The dramatist of the static theatre discovers the inevitability of human action, the poet of the ethereal becomes the celebrant of the humanly real.

Again in 1898, Maeterlinck dedicates a book, *Wisdom and Destiny*, to Mlle. Leblanc—in words eloquent of her influence: “I dedicate to you this book, which is, in effect, your work. There is a collaboration more lofty and more real than that of the pen; it is that of thought and example. I have not been obliged to imagine laboriously the resolutions and the actions of a wise ideal, or to extract from my heart the moral of a beautiful reverie necessarily a trifle vague. It has sufficed to listen to your words.

It has sufficed that my eyes have followed you attentively in life; they followed thus the movements, the gestures, the habits of wisdom herself."

Lovingly celebrated in his *Portrait of a Lady*, with its motto from La Bruyère: "He said that the intelligence of this fair lady was like a diamond in a handsome setting"—Mlle. Leblanc finds real incarnation in Monna Vanna, which she is destined to create with moving and magic force. *Monna Vanna* is Maeterlinck's great human challenge of mystic morality to the modern world—no fourth-dimensional drama of the spirit, "pinnacled dim in the intense inane", but a drama of flesh and blood, of heart as well as of soul. It bears all the hall-marks of the drama of to-day, even to its ideal spectator, its undulation of emotional process, its classic conflict of wills. It bears the pure Maeterlinckian stamp as well—but this time the glorious struggle of the ideal morality against the purely human passions of daily life. Monna Vanna is the apotheosis of womanhood—the *fine fleur* of the virginal type become volitional, latent in Aglavaine, just stretching shining pinions in Ardiane. With such high-minded disinterestedness is it conceived that our heart, in turn, goes out to the passionately loving, but outraged husband, Guido; to the barbaric, but essentially noble Prinzevalle; to the old Marco, sacrificing the love of his son to the ideal demands of the loftier morality; to Vanna, in her evolution from blushing and tender

femininity to decisive and noble womanhood. The unresolved cadence of its clamant finale is our concession to the mystic Maeterlinck. "With conscious strength", as Anselma Heine says, "Monna Vanna carries her fault upon her shoulders like a coronation mantle, and with uplifted gaze strides forth into happiness."

## XI

*The Blue Bird*, Maeterlinck's "Fairy Play in Five Acts", is, on reflection, less a surprise than a confirmation. Here at last is the "anthology for children"—neither from Shakspeare, nor for Patagonians—but pure Maeterlinck, an allegorical fantasy of that search for ideal happiness with which he is ever concerned. From the essay on Luck in *The Buried Temple* there is a significant passage which adumbrates this new fancy. "Let us unweariedly follow each path that leads from our consciousness to our unconsciousness. We shall thus succeed in hewing some kind of track through the great and as yet impassable roads that lead from the seen to the unseen, from man to God, from the individual to the universe. At the end of these roads lies hidden the general secret of life." *The Blue Bird* belongs to that modern literature of childhood's dreamland, which finds such tragic exemplification in

Hauptmann's *The Assumption of Hannele*, such joyous celebration in Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Maeterlinck seems to be harking back to the ideas of his poet-friend, Charles Van Lerberghe; and in this new creation gives us a real play for marionettes that would have delighted the author of *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

It is a future possibility of Man to discover the soul of inanimate things, to conquer thus all the forces which are now veiled from and arrayed against him, and to live in a pantheistic universe of life, freedom and light. And it is Man's destiny to pursue that "great secret of things and of happiness", which is the Blue Bird of the Maeterlinckian fantasy. Some such general idea as this lies back of the simple symbolism and allegory of this fairy play.

In dreamland, Tytyl and Mytyl, the children of two old peasants, are visited by the fairy Bérylune who bids them start in search of the Blue Bird. This Blue Bird she must have for her little girl who is very ill. "We don't quite know what's the matter with her; she wants to be happy . . ."—thus the fairy Bérylune, who to the children seems to bear a strange resemblance to their neighbor, Madame Berlingot. The green hat with a diamond ornament, which Bérylune gives to Tytyl, enables him, by turning it a certain way, to see the inside of things, and to summon the souls of the inanimate. No sooner

has Tytyl turned the diamond than a wonderful change comes over everything, and forth come trooping the Hours, dancing merrily to the sound of delicious music, the souls of the Quartern-loaves, of man's one absolutely faithful servant, the Dog; the Cat, Water, "like a young girl, streaming, dishevelled and tearful", Milk, "a tall, white bashful figure who seems to be afraid of everything", sanctimonious Sugar, and a luminous creature of incomparable beauty, called Light. And now forthwith, with these strange and sprightly attendants, they start on their quest for the Blue Bird.

At the fairy's palace, Berylune explains to the children that if they can find the Blue Bird, they will know all, see all, at last dominate the universe—a Biblical reminder of that fruit of the tree of knowledge, eating which man shall know all things, both good and evil. They journey first to the Land of Memory, and there meet their grandparents and their long-lost brothers and sisters, who need only to be remembered to live again. Here Tytyl captures a bird which seems "blue as a blue glass marble"; but alas! as soon as they leave the Land of Memory—for when we dwell on the past in loving memory we idealize all things there—the bird is no longer blue.

And so their pilgrimage continues to the palace of Night, who lives in terror for fear Man will capture all his mysteries, and vanquish all his terrors.

Here Tytyl takes a peep into the cavern of the Ghosts, who, as Night explains, "have felt bored in there ever since Man ceased to take them seriously"; at the Sicknesses, who are not happy since "Man has been waging such a determined war upon them—especially since the discovery of the microbes. . . . The Doctors are so unkind to them." Though not yet winter, one of the smallest almost escapes, sneezing, coughing, and blowing its nose: it's Cold-in-the-Head. Nowhere can they find the Blue Bird—not among the Wars, the Shades and Terrors, the Mysteries, nor in the private locker where Night keeps the "unemployed Stars, my personal Perfumes, a few Glimmers that belong to me, such as Will-o'-the-Wisps, Glow-worms and Fireflies, also the Dew, the Song of the Nightingales, and so on . . . ." Finally, though warned that it is not permitted to open one great door, Tytyl musters up courage, to discover there

"the most unexpected of gardens, unreal, infinite, and ineffable, a dream-garden bathed in nocturnal light, where, among stars and planets, illumining all that they touch, flying ceaselessly from jewel to jewel and from moonbeam to moonbeam, fairylike blue birds hover perpetually and harmoniously down to the confines of the horizon, birds innumerable to the point of appearing to be the breath, the azured atmosphere, the very substance of the wonderful garden."

and express sorrow that they have been unable to find the Blue Bird. But Tytyl offers his own little turtle-dove for her sick child. She rapturously seizes it and runs to present it to the invalid. In a moment she returns, "holding by the hand a little girl of a fair and wonderful beauty, who carries Tytyl's dove pressed in her arms." The miracle is wrought, here at last is the Blue Bird. But as Tytyl, wishing to show her how to feed the dove, momentarily takes it from her, it escapes and flies away.

"Never mind, . . . Don't cry . . . I will catch him again", says Tytyl reassuringly. And with all the grace of a Peter Pan appealing to the public for their belief in fairies, Tytyl steps to the front of the stage and addresses the audience:

"If any of you should find him, would you be so kind as to give him back to us? . . . We need him for our happiness, later on . . ."

Maeterlinck's marvellous imaginative faculty for evocation of images of rare, strange beauty plays through the scenic directions. That greatest of living stage-managers, the Russian Stanislavsky, has already realized Maeterlinck's intention in a production notable for the magic beauty of its setting. *The Blue Bird* was played in Moscow for considerably more than a year, and has been produced all over Russia literally by scores of companies. It was most fitting that *The Blue*



*Bird* should have been remarkably and successfully produced in London; for M. Maeterlinck has gracefully acknowledged Mr. Barrie as "the father of *Peter Pan*, and the grandfather of *The Blue Bird*." Its success in England has been marvellous: after several hundred performances there appears no abatement in public interest. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at, for M. Maeterlinck, always lucky in his collaborators, enjoyed the good fortune of having the genius of a poet devoted to all the complicated details of production and inscenation. Every detail bore the marks of the imaginative genius of Mr. Herbert Trench, the poet, and the scenery and costumes revealed the picturesque art of Mr. F. Cayley Robinson and Mr. S. H. Sime. Memorable in beauty, in fantasy, and in suggestiveness were the designs for *The Palace of the Night* with its stately quadrangle and mystic, columned temple; the *Kingdom of the Future* with its succession of oval arches painted in cerulean blue and the changing colors of ships and figures at the embarkation of the unborn children for their voyage to this world; the magic Garden filled with radiant blue birds, ceaselessly fluttering hither and thither, through the instrumentality of the wonder-working biograph; and the austere dignity of the *Forest*, with its gnarled, primeval, dense-packed trees. Children sat speechless and spellbound in unsophisticated contemplation of this youthful, modern quest of a new

Too easily dazzled by this glitter, they seize eagerly only those birds that are within reach—only to discover when they are held to the light that the birds are dead.

In the Forest, betrayed by the treacherous Cat, they are beset by all the trees and animals, who know that if the Blue Bird is captured, their last breath of freedom and independence of man expires. Though guarded zealously by the faithful Dog, the children are hard put to it to defend themselves, and are rescued in the end only by the intervention of Light. Next they seek the Blue Bird in the Graveyard—but they are not accompanied by Light, who might terrify the dead, nor by Fire, “who would want to burn the dead, as of old; and that is no longer done . . .” Tytyl turns the jewel, and

“Then, from all the gaping tombs, there rises gradually an efflorescence at first frail and timid like steam; then white and virginal and more and more tufty, more and more tall and plentiful and marvellous. Little by little, irresistibly, invading all things, it transforms the graveyard into a sort of fairy-like and nuptial garden, over which rise the first rays of the dawn . . .”

Stunned and dazzled, Mytyl asks, looking in the grass, “where are the dead?” And Tytyl, looking, answers: “There are no dead . . .”

Once again they resume their pilgrimage, this

time to the Kingdom of the Future, peopled with the Blue Children, who await the hour of their birth. One prophesies that, once on earth, he will have to "invent the thing that gives happiness"; another will invent a "machine that flies in the air like a bird without wings" (whether a Blériot monoplane or a Wright biplane is left in doubt); another will "bring pure joy to the globe by means of ideas which people have not yet had." At last white-bearded Time, with scythe and hour-glass, appears upon the threshold; and one catches a glimpse of the "white and gold sails of a galley moored to a sort of quay, formed by the rosy mists of the Dawn." As the galley floats away to Earth, bearing the Blue children, Tytyl and Mytyl hear an extremely distant song of gladness and expectation. Tytyl inquires, "What is that? . . . It sounds like other voices . . ." To which Light responds, "Yes, it is the song of the mothers coming out to meet them."

The children at last return to earth, for Light assures them that she has caught the Blue Bird and has it hidden under her cloak. They awake in the cottage of their parents, now illumined, as if by magic, with strange, fresh beauty; and they talk so strangely of their long dream-pilgrimage, more real than reality, that their mother is alarmed for fear they have discovered the hiding place of her husband's brandy-bottle. When Madame Berlingot enters, the children to her surprise call her Bérylune,

Holy Grail, while men and women read therein the meanings vouchsafed them by their own life-quests. The pretty fantasy with its individualized figures, whether of abstraction or beast or inanimate object, its eager, earnest children, its easy dialogue, its simple allegory and symbolism, its light hints of a secondary intention, its poetic imaginativeness and above all its delicate and playful humor, reveal a Maeterlinck who at once endears himself to all who love children, to all who have ever engaged in a perhaps not wholly fruitless quest for that elusive and evanescent thing we call Happiness.

*HENRIK IBSEN*



**I**

**HENRIK IBSEN**

**THE EVOLUTION OF HIS  
MIND AND ART**

*"In reality my development is thoroughly consecutive. I myself can indicate the various threads in the whole course of my development, the unity of my ideas, and their gradual evolution, and I . . . shall prove to the world that I am the same person to-day that I was on the day I first found myself."*

*Henrik Ibsen to Lorentz Dietrichson.*



## I

From the standpoint of present-day America, with its gospel of the strenuous life, its tendency to hero-worship with the masterful captain of industry for hero, its Roosevelts and its Pearys, Henrik Ibsen may be said to have lived a singularly uneventful, marvellously secluded life. His future biographer—for no one has yet succeeded, or even made a legitimate attempt to succeed, in mirroring the features of this placid exterior life of crowded inner tumultuousness—must match Ibsen himself in patience, detachment and single-mindedness. Until now, it may fairly be said that the literature concerned with the life and art of Henrik Ibsen deals almost solely with a traditionary figure. This legendary being is a little crabbed old man, taciturn, uncommunicative, even bearish, who occasionally broke the silence only to advance his own interests, to lash out with envenomed rage at his enemies, or else to affront gratuitously the friends and admirers who sought to do him public honor. Now that we are left alone with memories—and reminiscences

both kindly and malicious—, the spiritual lineaments of the Norwegian seer tend to define themselves to vision. For the first time, in the light of the reminiscences of his friends and acquaintances, is it becoming possible to discover the man in his works, and to trace some of the many vital threads in the close-meshed fabric of his art. In the light, too, of his literary remains—piously collected and astutely edited by Koht and Elias—one may at last follow his work consistently from first to last in a chain of unbroken sequence, and test the validity of Ibsen's claim that his development as artist is consistent, uniform, evolutionary. Heretofore, the salient details of Ibsen's exterior life have been recorded with mediate accuracy; and numerous efforts, brilliant, mediocre, futile, have been made toward achieving the biography of Ibsen's mind. The great work which yet remains to be done is to relate the man to his work, to discover the real human being who lurks behind the cartoons of Vallotton, Laerum and Scotson-Clark, the real human heart beating beneath the formidable frock-coat of the "little buttoned-up man."

## II

America has been prolific in studies which betray crass unfamiliarity with the *milieu* from which Ibsen sprang, as well as imperfect comprehension of the

streams of European thought which profoundly affected his spiritual development. The real contributions to the knowledge of Ibsen on the part of American scholars and critics have been concerned, in the main, with Ibsen's technical ability and with those inalienable qualities of his art which have rendered him, as a dramatist, unique and distinctive. To Ibsen, the countries which have shown most profound regard for his significance gave a defining title and character: Norway thought of him first as a conservative and later as a radical; Germany was widely divided between those who classed him, respectively, as naturalist, individualist, and socialist; and France abhorred his anarchy while celebrating his symbolism. Despite the admirable and scholarly work of Archer, Gosse, Herford, Wicksteed and others, the brilliant polemics of Bernard Shaw, the elevated but sporadic performances of Janet Achurch, Elizabeth Robins, and other exemplars of the modern school of acting, and lastly the dignified work of the societies for the promotion of the modern drama, Ibsen has never laid the "great public" in England under his spell nor assumed, in the eyes of the reading-public, the dignity of a classic.

There are many and cogent reasons why America has never profited by the lessons Ibsen presented so unmistakably to his own and to future generations. As individualist, Ibsen could hope to create no uproar in a country which surpasses the countries of

the Ibsen social dramas in the production of self-assertive individualists. In America there was—and is—no school of acting, classic in finish, classic in tradition, to interpret the complex harmonies of the Ibsenian dramas. The New Theatre is still a novel experiment. Mansfield's production of *Peer Gynt* was a half-hearted concession to what he regarded as a popular craze for the bizarre and the abnormal; and the brilliant performances of Mrs. Fiske as Hedda Gabler and of Miss Mary Shaw as Mrs. Alving, to mention the most notable achievements, reeked too strongly of the unhealthy and the distorted to conquer permanently the prejudices of American audiences which are nightly flattered with the display of brilliant costumes, beautiful but incompetent "stars", and heroic-looking, but wooden, "matinée idols" for their delectation. Nazimova demonstrated that there was an audience in America that really relished Ibsen; and the lists of the most popular books at public libraries in America contain the plays of Ibsen as a stock number.

In two notable respects, Ibsen should mean much for the present and for the future of American dramatic art. No fear of misunderstanding prevents the statement that Ibsen was the first and greatest of the literary muck-rakers of modern drama. From the turbulent squabbles of Norway as well as from the social ferment of Europe, Ibsen drew trenchant and immediate lessons from public conduct as well

as from personal morals. The Plimsoll agitation in England for proper laws regulating the insurance of unseaworthy vessels, reflected in the press of Norway, was at the back of *The Pillars of Society*; and Thaulow's public propaganda against a local society which he deemed fraudulent eventuated in the fight of Dr. Stockmann for the purification of the baths of his native town. *John Gabriel Borkman* is rooted in the reality of the daily life of Norway; and *The League of Youth* fell afoul of Björnson and his coterie. It may be thought that Ibsen as champion of individual emancipation came too late for a country whose greatest boasts are its freedom and its scope for the free play of individuality. And yet, there are people so critically censorious as to maintain that there is no real freedom in America; and that we are bound hard and fast by the puritanical formulas of a provincial civilization. Freedom of thought in America has in no sense kept pace with license of conduct; and a country which cannot suppress night-riding, lynching and mob-violence should not throw stones at Gorki, Zola—or *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. America, with its Moses and its Walshes, need seek no further for wounded titans of finance like Borkman; and the *Slocum* disaster dwarfs the *Indian Girl* of *The Pillars of Society* into trivial insignificance. In Dr. Charles W. Stiles America can point to a Dr. Stockmann with a nation, rather than a minor watering-

place, for the field of his inquiry. The most significant lesson of modern democracy in America, learned not from Ibsen but from the dire example of the American Sugar Company, and a thousand other scandals, is that, in its fullest significance, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. The literature of exposure is never *mal à propos* in a civilization whose protection rests upon perpetual publicity.

The buoyant youth of America, impressing alike a Van Eeden and a Ferrero, is both its strength and its weakness. It bespeaks at once America's inexperience in self-control and her optimism of outlook. America can furnish towns as provincial in tone as ever won the amused contempt of European audiences at the performance of Ibsen's plays of Norwegian life; and her political life furnishes types of half-baked political leaders no less contemptible and inexperienced than Stensgaard and his young men's league. But America is young and hopeful, at least; it is not peopled, we are confidently assured, with soul-sick tragedians mouthing their futile protests against the iron vice of environment, the ineradicable scar of heredity, the fell clutch of circumstance. Ibsen's pathological preoccupations should have no meaning for America—his dalliance with sick consciences, obsessed personalities, wounded souls, disillusioned fatalists. But America should take to heart Ibsen's bold challenge for individual freedom, his insistence upon moral duties, his con-

cern for marriage founded upon equitable relations between husband and wife, his claim of the individual's right to develop fully and without trammel, and lastly, his faith that human love and the happiness that it secures for the individual transcend all the glories of the palace of art,—all the victories that vaulting ambition can achieve. All that is needed for a real appreciation of Ibsen in America is a re-application of these inspiring lessons to our youthful, buoyant, optimistic yet inchoate society.

As man, as social thinker, Ibsen has for America these distinct and salutary lessons. As artist and craftsman, his message is no less signal and imperative. Ibsen's technique is one of the supreme glories of his art; and there can be little doubt that, in certain plays, the technique displayed is inextricably bound up with the dramatic genius which devised it. But no would-be dramatist of modern life to-day, in its limited environment and in its circumscribed sphere, can afford to neglect the study of the technique of Henrik Ibsen. In order to mirror the real life of to-day in perfect naturalness, the dramatist must realize the evolutionary trend of the drama and study carefully the models set by Ibsen for our day and generation. Thus will he be the better enabled to realize Ibsen's ideal: "to produce the impression on the reader that what he was reading was something that had really happened." The great secret to be learned from a study of Ibsen's craftsmanship

is the way he bridges over the gap between art and life by identifying the action and the exposition. As Bernard Shaw admirably expressed it: "What we might have learned from Ibsen was that our fashionable dramatic material was worn out as far as cultivated modern people are concerned; that what really interests such people on the stage is not what we call action—meaning two well-known and rather short-sighted actors pretending to fight a duel without their glasses, or a handsome leading man chasing a beauteous leading lady round the stage with threats, obviously not feasible, of immediate rapine—but stories of lives, discussion of conduct, unveiling of motives, conflict of characters in talk, laying bare of souls, discovery of pitfalls—in short, *illumination* of life . . . ."

### III

It has often been said that the drama can never be the same again, now that Ibsen has lived and written. It may be said with even greater truth that the world can never be the same again, since Ibsen has lived and written. The spirit of modern times, the form and pressure of the age, the most fruitful germs of modern culture are embodied in the dramas of Ibsen. It should be the purpose of the drama to



crystallize and body forth ideals for the human race, and thus to inform reality with the ideal. For the age of Shakspeare, the idea of art was "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." The nineteenth century brought forth a man who boldly declared that we are no longer living in the time of Shakspeare. He clearly realized that the artist's attitude toward life must be redemptive as well as revelative. Every man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs. The function of contemporary art, of dramatic art *par excellence*, is something higher than mere reflection. It is not enough merely to catch the surface sheen of life. Modern art concerns itself, must concern itself, with penetrative interpretation. The drama is not only a mirror to reflect the surface of things, but also a Röntgen ray to penetrate the surface and reveal, beneath the outer integument, the fundamental frame-work and structure of modern life. The great dramatists are the brief and abstract chronometers of the time. "It is surely the great use of modern drama," says Pinero, "that while in its day it provides a rational entertainment, in the future it may serve as a history of the hour which gives it birth." This is perhaps the least service rendered by the drama: to serve as an historical record of the age. Many realistic critics

maintain that the only works of art worth considering as historical are not those written in one epoch to give a view of the life or the events of some earlier epoch, but those which deal with the life of the time at which they are written, and have grown truly historical through the lapse of years. Ibsen's supremacy springs, not from his so-called historical dramas, of the type which Maeterlinck defines as "artificial poems that arise from the impossible marriage of past and present," but from his real historical dramas—his personal and social dramas of contemporary life.

All great minds, in contemplating the riddle of the human chimera and the disquieting mystery of life, must have realized, with Leibniz, that "every present is laden with the past and big with the future." A world-dramatist like Ibsen is the child of the past, the companion of the present, the progenitor of the future—trinity indissoluble. That he is the heir of the ages but increases his obligation to body forth with convincing truth the age in which he lives. Goethe maintained that, in order to know the man, it is necessary to know the age in which he lived. To no time in the world's history is this truth so apposite as to the present. The feeling of cosmic unity and the sentiment of social solidarity have so penetrated and informed the thought of to-day that no one questions the statement, as ap-

plied to the dominant personality, that the age helps to create the man and the man helps to create the age. Every epoch-making mind, it has been said, is at the same time child and father, disciple and master, of his age. The more fully he surrenders himself to it, the more fully will he control it. "Our pride and sense of human independence rebel against the belief that men of genius obey a movement quite as much as they control it, and even more than they create it," says John Addington Symonds. "We gain a new sense of the vitality and spiritual solidarity of human thought. At first sight the individual lessens; but the race, the mass from which the individual emerges and of which he becomes the spokesman and interpreter, gains in dignity and greatness. Shakspeare is not less than he is, because we know him as necessary to a series. His eminence remains his own."

In this light, the masterpieces of modern drama appear, not as detached monuments of literary art, but as symbols of a growing world-spirit. We see in the evolution of the individual the evolution of the race, in the regeneration of the individual the regeneration of society. The study of the interpreter of life to-day resolves itself into a study of the vital phases of the struggle that is going on in humanity to-day.

## IV

We are living to-day in an age of transition—the transition between criticism and faith. The nineteenth century was called the age of perhaps the greatest doubt and the greatest faith the world has ever known. Science, with its transforming theories, its destructive and far-reaching criticism, swept the world with the force of an avalanche. The world has had to be reconstituted. The new world is just now beginning to emerge, like the phoenix, from the ashes of the old. The laboratory method, the dissecting fever, the analytic spirit have permeated and given new form to every department of human life. Nothing was accepted as fact until placed under the microscope, or perhaps subjected to the bombardment of X-rays, or else analyzed in a retort. So, to-day, we have a new psychology, a new art, a new medicine, a new sociology, a new religion. Everywhere modification and alteration, redistribution and readjustment.

The world demands the Truth to-day, for it has scientifically demonstrated the Biblical theorem that the truth shall make you free.

Under the influence of the conception of cosmic unity, tracing its origin to Auguste Comte and permeating all modern thought, society has grown to

symbolize a vast wave which carries along the individual with it. The laws of its motion are fixed: if the individual resists, he is submerged. The individual is but a tiny atom tossed upon the surface of this turbulent wave. Government in many cases appears to mean the stifling of the wise and enlightened few by the will of the ignorant and thoughtless many.

The social compact often robs the individual of freedom.

From the standpoint of evolution, the individual is at war with his fellows. The long line of scientists, from Lamarck to Spencer, from Huxley to Haeckel, from Darwin to De Vries have held their solemn clinics and registered their stern verdict. The theories of unlimited competition, of the invariability of species, of the mutability of organic forms, of the survival of the fittest (or is it, perhaps, the survival of the most unscrupulous?) are pronounced by the vast majority to be laws as sure, inevitable and relentless as the facts of life and death. The struggle for existence is the stern reality the individual cannot shirk. This struggle is sharpened in direct proportion to the increase in the cost of the staple commodities of life. Competition becomes so fierce as to amount, in many cases, to oppression, elimination, destruction.

In certain lights, life takes on the guise of a brutal fight.

From the side of modern medicine and modern biology, a more sinister spectre robs the world of peaceful sleep. The scientist, the surgeon, the physician play the leading rôles in the drama of our life. Nerve strain, neurasthenia, mental collapse, physical ills of every sort beset and menace on all sides a world which has already passed the first flush of youth. The ghost of Hamlet's father is a less terrifying apparition than the spectres of our own brain. All men are not born free and equal—not even those born in the same rank of society. Do what we will, we cannot escape the influence of the past. Heredity lays its skeleton hand upon us and we enter the struggle for existence with the ineradicable taint of hereditary weakness or degeneracy gnawing like a vulture at our very vitals.

The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation.

The modern theories of spiritualism, thought-transference and hypnotic suggestion fill our souls with awe and disquiet, and tend to depress our sense of human vitality. Such scientists as Myers, Hyslop, Lombroso, Lodge and a score of others, working both independently and through reputable societies for psychical research, are making slow, but persistent efforts to fret away the thin veil—if such there be!—between matter and spirit. In the minds of many, there remains little room for doubt, not simply of the control of mind over matter, but of

the control of mind over mind, of spirit over spirit. The dominant will comes into the sphere of our life, exerts upon us its occult influence, and our weaker will succumbs.

Humanity is the dynamo of potential forces which we cannot fathom. Hypnotism is the thief of individuality.

Ever since the beginning of the world until the last century, two different standards of conduct prevailed for men and women. For the two sexes there obtained two different sets of laws, two different codes of ethics, two different philosophies of life. Ever since Mary Wollstonecraft awoke the world with her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; ever since John Stuart Mill animadverted against the subjection of woman; ever since Henrik Ibsen declared in burning words that in the *Workers* and the *Women* he placed all his hopes for the future, and that for them he would work with all his strength—this age has won the right to the title: the age of Woman's Emancipation. Through the slow but titanic pressure of the feminist movement, woman is at last beginning to gain the freedom—economic, intellectual, moral, and even political!—which has so long been denied her. The true relation between man and woman as co-ordinate factors in human progress is at last coming to light.

The emancipation of woman, in the completest sense, is on the way.

This is an age marked by unsettled and conflicting views in regard to standards of morality. "Social progress", it has been said, "takes effect through the replacement of old institutions by new ones; and since every institution involves the recognition of the duty of conforming to it, progress must involve the repudiation of an established duty at every turn." The world has had its eyes opened to the flaws in our rough-and-ready morality by the rhapsodic invective of Nietzsche, the mordant irony of Ibsen, the impassioned zeal of Tolstoi, the enlightening satire of Bernard Shaw, the lightning humor of Mark Twain. Inequality of divorce laws in the different States of America, for example, makes a man who is a scoundrel in one state a respectable gentleman in another. Murders under the specious excuse of the "unwritten law" are only too tragically frequent. In some States, children, even before birth, may be willed or deeded away like chattels. The fundamental principles of right and wrong—whatever they are, no one seems to know them!—are, of course, eternal; but the conventional code of conduct, the "morality of custom," as Nietzsche termed it, cannot with justice be applied invariably and unexceptionally.

Conventional morality is a very untrustworthy standard for distinguishing between right and wrong.



The great discovery of modern life is that society, not the individual, is at fault. Democratic government is on trial. We no longer boast, with Shakspeare, of Man: "noble in reason, infinite in faculty, in form and moving express and admirable, in action like an angel, in apprehension like a god," for we realize the sad botch he has made of the actual affairs of life. The humanizing influences of fraternal sympathy, of social pity and social justice must replace the more personal and selfish interests of the individual. Social criticism is the sign-manual of the age. Redemption for the individual is to be attained through a recognition of the intolerable injustices of modern society, and through consistent efforts at remedial and constructive measures for its reorganization. "There still remains in the depths of every heart of loyal intention," says Maeterlinck, "a great duty of charity and justice that eclipses all others. And it is perhaps from the struggle of this duty against our egoism and ignorance that the veritable drama of our century shall spring."

The sociologist, the social reformer, is destined to be the hero of the future.

With science as the active and dominant spirit of the age, to whose tests all questions are now-a-days subjected, we begin to gain some sort of perspective of the complex character of contemporary existence

with which the interpreter of life has to deal. The insistent problems of the social complex, the evolution of the individual under the operation of the law of the survival of the fittest, the sociological doctrine of environment, the biological theories of heredity and temperament, the psychic phenomena of hypnotism and spiritualism, the great gulf fixed between social influence and social impotence, the hideous corruption of politics, business and finance, the increasing unrest and discontent of the laboring classes, the growing artificiality of metropolitan life, distrust in conventional standards of morality, partial and imperfect justice meted out to woman, widespread dissatisfaction with the grosser injustices and inequalities of society and its organization, and, permeating all, the relentless criticism of science and sociology—these are, in sum, the momentous problems of chiefest significance in contemporary life which demand adequate treatment, with the prospect of eventual solution, at the hands of the conscientious student of present-day conditions.

It is through his masterful exposition and treatment of many of these deep and ever-widening problems that Henrik Ibsen has attained to supreme eminence and authority in the drama of our time.

## V

No extravagance lurks in the statement that Henrik Ibsen is the greatest Teutonic dramatist since Shakspeare, and the greatest dramatist of any race or clime, of our modern era. Not until he served an apprenticeship of decades did he earn the right to that comprehensive characterization. It became his due only after years of preparatory pre-occupation with the legendary, the poetic, the historical, and the romantic. Henrik Johan Ibsen was born on March 28, 1828, at Skien, Norway. Ibsen and Björnson are customarily classed together as the great Norwegian geniuses; and Ibsen has long borne the title of the Norwegian Seer. A Scoto-Dano-Teuton seems a more fitting, if more cumbersome, characterization for this so-called Norwegian. Genealogical researches, extending as far back as Ibsen's great-great-grandparents, indicate that Ibsen had not a drop of Norwegian blood in his veins. The three strains in his ancestry are Scotch, Danish and German. It is perhaps attaching no undue importance to hereditary influence to attribute the lyric delicacy and sensitiveness of his poetry to the Danish element in his blood, his uncompromising morality and high ethical standards to Scotch influ-

ence, and his passion for abstract logic to the three-fold German strain.

The Stockmann house in which Ibsen was born faced an open square on one side of which stood the town-pillory, on the other the mad-house and the lock-up; while the Latin school, the grammar schools and the church looked on as if in protest. It was under the shadow of such surroundings, with their oppressive atmosphere of solemnity and gloom, that the first years of Ibsen's youth were spent. The Ibsen family was prosperous, moved in the "best circles", and were inclined to be lavish in their hospitality. When Henrik was eight years old, financial disaster overtook the family, and they were forced to withdraw to a small farm house on the outskirts of the little town, where they lived in poverty and retirement. This sudden transition from affluence to poverty made a profound impression upon the eight-year-old child. Ibsen afterwards remarked that those who had taken most advantage of his parents' hospitality in their prosperous days were precisely those who now most markedly turned to them the cold shoulder. Ibsen never quite forgot the lesson thus early learned of the shallowness and insincerity of society. This was doubtless the initial influence in bringing to pass that crushing indictment of modern society which runs through all his middle and later dramas.

There was nothing full-blooded or athletic about

the youthful Ibsen; he seems to have cared nothing for outdoor sports. His chief distraction came from shutting himself away in a private little room of his own, and poring for hours over musty tomes, rare prints, old engravings, and the like. According to his sister's account, the only outdoor amusement in which he indulged was the building of houses—of what material she does not say. As a boy, he loved to play the part of magician, to mystify his elders, and to perform, with his brother's aid, tricks of legerdemain. It is noteworthy that he had a passion for cutting out fantastically dressed little figures in pasteboard, attaching them to wooden blocks, and arranging them in groups or tableaux. It requires little imagination to see the dramatist in embryo here—the play of the constructive faculty, the passion for technical sleight-of-hand, the fundamental interest in the manipulation of fictitious characters. There is strong reason to believe that Ibsen kept up this early child's play—identifying imaginary characters with little material models—throughout his entire life.

Considerable talent for painting showed itself in the youthful Ibsen; and like Bernard Shaw after him, he had an ambition to be a great painter. But financial exigency forbade; and at the age of sixteen, Ibsen was apprenticed, not to a Norwegian Raphael or Danish Titian, but—to an apothecary. The anarchist in Ibsen, so often displayed in later years, was first aroused to literary expression by

the Revolution of 1848. The ferment in Europe, Ibsen himself confessed, "had a strong and ripening effect on my development, immature though it remained both then and long afterwards. I wrote clangorous poems of encouragement to the Magyars, adjuring them, for the sake of freedom and humanity, not to falter in their righteous war against 'the tyrant'; and I composed a long series of sonnets to King Oscar—urging him to set aside all petty considerations, and march without delay, at the head of his army, to the assistance of our Danish brothers on the Slesvig frontier."

In the meantime, he devoted his time to preparing for his matriculation examination at Christiania University, where he purposed studying medicine. By a remarkable chance, the subject assigned him by the University for examination was the Conspiracy of Catiline, to be studied in the history of Sallust and the oration of Cæsar. Ibsen relates that he "devoured these documents greedily"; and a few months later his first drama, *Catiline*, was finished. The opening lines of this play might serve as the prophecy of Ibsen's whole life work:

"I must, I must; a voice is crying to me  
From my Soul's depths, and I will follow it."

This youth, so "spectral" as his companions called him, going about like an enigma sealed with seven seals, found a most congenial subject in the story of

*Catiline*. For Ibsen felt himself at odds with the community in which he lived, and was fired to do something bold and daring. This play contained in vague outlines many of the features identified with his later works: "the opposition between power and enterprise, between will and potentiality, alike the tragedy and the comedy of humanity." His future methods are previsited here in his employment of his own individual technique—a dark and ancient secret inaugurates the action and causes the catastrophe; while two women, the one all passion, the other all gentleness, struggle for the love of the hero. Sallust may have influenced Ibsen far more than did Cæsar, as Mr. Gosse suggests; but behind all lurk the influences of the most important prose-writer of Norwegian romanticism, Mauritz Hansen, and of the distinguished poet and dramatist, Henrik Wergeland. The edition of *Catiline* with the exception of thirty copies which, strangely enough, found purchasers, was disposed of as waste paper to a huckster; "for the next few days," Ibsen laconically remarks, "we (his room-mate Schulerud, who published *Catiline* at his own expense, and himself) lacked none of the first necessities of life"!

The little one-act drama, *The Warrior's Tomb*, which Ibsen brought with him in an unfinished state from Bergen, was finally completed and accepted by the Christiania Theatre. Though little financial aid came from the three productions given at Chris-

tania, Ibsen was greatly encouraged by the acceptance of the play. This trivial play, with its exterior comparisons between the South and the North, is noteworthy solely for its traces of Oehlenschläger's influence; if it were the sole extant fragment of Ibsen's work, he would never have been heard of. Its closing lines:

"Dem Grab entsteigt dann Nordland hell und hehr:  
Zur Geistesthat auf des Gedankens Meer!"

foreshadow his youthful confidence in his own future. His poverty was extreme; had it not been for his exceptionally strong constitution, his health must inevitably have suffered. One of his acquaintances at this time recently wrote that "when Ibsen's financial condition compelled him to practise the most stringent economy, he tried to do without underclothing, and finally even without stockings. In these experiments he succeeded; and in winter he went without an overcoat; yet without being troubled by colds or other bodily ills."

In preparing for the University, Ibsen met Björnson, who described him at this time in the words (no wonder!):

"languid and lean, with a complexion like gypsum,  
Behind an immense coal-black beard—Henrik  
Ibsen."

This was the beginning of that long acquaintance between the two great geniuses, blighted for a time



rather by the misunderstandings of partisans than of the principals, but afterwards renewed with larger appreciation and deeper comprehension—a relation cemented by the marriage of Ibsen's son to Björnson's daughter. It is worth mentioning that Ibsen warmly espoused the labor movement at this early period, at one time narrowly escaping arrest and imprisonment. From this time forward, though not active in its display, he felt a deep and abiding interest in the labor movement, which was terminated only by his death.

The financial siege was temporarily raised when Ole Bull, the great violinist, offered Ibsen the post of "theatre-poet" at the newly constituted National Theatre in Bergen. Though Ibsen's salary was less than \$350 a year, it was eked out by travelling grants, and gave him his first real start in the world as a dramatist. In Grimstad, Ibsen had written *Catiline*, perhaps under the influence of Schiller; *The Warrior's Mound*, originally entitled *The Normans*, after the manner of Oehlenschläger, though with ruder touch; and in 1849, he had actually begun his work on *Olaf Trygvesson*. In 1850, probably in Christiania, Ibsen chose a motive from Faye's book of Norwegian folk-lore as the theme for *The Ptar-migan of Justedal*; but on the appearance of Landstad's book of Norwegian folk-songs, and after Ibsen had completed one act and part of another, he re-worked his material into the final form of *Olaf*

*Liljekrans*. He later made a brief attempt at an opera, under the title of *The Ptarmigan*; but only one act and a tiny fragment of another was ever completed. The fragments of *The Ptarmigan of Justedal*, and of the opera-text *The Ptarmigan*, now for the first time published in Ibsen's *Posthumous Works*, are interesting solely from the biographical side.

It was one of Ibsen's duties as "theatre-poet" to have a new play ready for each recurrence of January 2, the "Foundation Day" of the theatre. On that day, in 1853, Ibsen produced his own romantic comedy of *St. John's Night*. Under the spell of the punch seasoned by a nixie with malicious intent, each one of the two young people who are engaged find that, in reality, they love someone else—quite after the manner of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As in many future dramas of Ibsen, for instance, in *The League of Youth*, and *The Wild Duck*, an ancient wrong plays a decisive rôle in the play—in this case, cutting the Gordian knot, dissolving the betrothal, and sending all away happy, each Jack with his Jill. It betrays Ibsen's first attempt at an artful intrigue, so admirably achieved later in *Lady Inger of Oestraat*, the best of Ibsen's dramas written under French influence. Julius Poulsen, the mildly ludicrous poet and nationalist, in his own person reduces to absurdity the æsthetics of Heiberg; in him we recognize the prototype of both Peer Gynt

and Hjalmar Ekdal. The whole drama may be construed as an effort to distinguish between true romance and false romanticism. Juliane's words:—

"I must suffer and be silent—ah! that is woman's lot in this world."

foreshadow Ingeborg's memorable words in *The Pretenders*:

"To love, to sacrifice all, and be forgotten, that is woman's saga."

And clear prevision of *A Comedy of Love* lurks in Poulsen's words:

"In the state of amorousness, one treats love theoretically. Betrothal and marriage on the other hand—you see—those are practical affairs—and in practice, as we know, theories do not always hold good."

Though not produced until 1857, *Olaf Liljekrans* had its first conception seven years earlier. It is woven from the ballad of Sir Olaf, lured away by a fairy just as he is on the way to bring home his bride, and the folk-tale of the wild, graceful young maiden of Justedal valley, roaming the woods like the shy ptarmigan. The story is trivial; and the characters are insipid. There is only one incident which points forward to the Ibsen of a maturer phase of art, the scene in which Hemming and Ingeborg, the impractical lovers, discover after their flight together that they are incapable of the sort

of love which will sustain them through all privations. This motive was, in a later year, to furnish the impulse for the like predicament of Falk and Svanhild in *A Comedy of Love*.

The publication of Ibsen's *Posthumous Works* brings to light Ibsen's hitherto unpublished skit on current political affairs in Norway—much the sort of thing one frequently reads in *New York Life*; it is deserving of a word before entering into the deeper current of Ibsen's development as a dramatist in *Lady Inger of Oestraat*. When Ibsen came to Christiania in March, 1850, he was full of revolutionary ideas; and a year later he observed with satirical contempt the new Storthing abandoning the advanced position they had taken in 1848. One morning he visited the Tribune of the Storthing, and the same evening, while attending a performance of Bellini's opera *Norma*, the idea of the political satire came into his head. In the little satire, Severus—otherwise Herr Stabell—flirts now with Norma (the Opposition), now with Adalgisa (the party in power); various other members of the Storthing are openly satirized. All the vaunted pretensions of adherence that Severus first makes to Norma are proven insincere in the end when Adalgisa throws around him her protection and transforms him into a demigod—or in other words, a Minister! The effect is magical: all, even Norma, bow down reverentially before him, acknowledging in the position of

Minister, gained at whatever sacrifice of party fealty, the true goal of the legislator. Slight as it is, the little skit shows Ibsen in a lightly satirical mood; and points forward to the time when he will pour out the vials of his wrath and contempt upon compromise and half-heartedness in his own nation. It stands as a signpost to the Ibsen of *The League of Youth* and *An Enemy of the People*.

In 1854 Ibsen revived *The Warrior's Mound* at the National Theatre, without popular success; and in 1855, he presented at the same theatre *Lady Inger of Oestraat*, his first drama which possesses significance, not only as a link in his artistic development, but for its own striking and signal merits.

*Lady Inger of Oestraat*, a long, five-act play, is really a remarkable imaginative re-vitalization of the spirit of an epoch centuries past. Comparison of the drama with the facts of history reveals Ibsen's faculty for discovering a splendid dramatic situation in an unpromising historical episode. There is something mystic and crepuscular in the atmosphere of this dark tragedy; and yet its mystery is less the spell of mood, than the confusion that results from imperfect and mystifying technique. "Go back to *Lady Inger*," says Bernard Shaw, "and you will be tempted to believe that Ibsen was deliberately burlesquing the absurdities of Richardson's booth; for the action is carried on mostly in impossible asides." For the first time in his career, Ibsen reveals the

influence of his studies, both of classic and contemporary drama. The Greek element imbues the story itself—the retributive justice of secret sin committed long anterior to the opening of the play—, that retrospective method which Ibsen afterwards made so peculiarly his own. The complications and intrigues show the diligence with which Ibsen has studied the artificial methods of that dexterous contriver, Scribe. For the first time also in his career Ibsen displays real genius for deep characterization—alike in the queenly woman, apparently destined to free her people from the tyrant, yet harassed by the thought of her past transgressions; in Nils Lykke, the fascinating libertine, purified through his love for a high-souled, gentle woman; and Elina, Ibsen's first genuinely appealing female character. *Lady Inger of Oestraat* was not a success—failing to please the playgoers of Bergen and not wholly satisfying Ibsen himself. Nor is this to be wondered at; for Ibsen was fumbling with technical methods, obsolescent and derivative, not yet having discovered his own original fingering for the dramatic keyboard. This dark drama, reminiscent now of *Macbeth*, now of Websterian violence and blood, now of German romanticism, now of Scribe, is striking but imperfectly conceived. Genuinely interesting as a strong link in the evolution of Ibsen's art, as a step in the historical development of contemporary drama it is virtually negligible.

In *The Feast at Solhaug*, produced at the Bergen Theatre on January 2, 1856, Ibsen achieved his first genuine local success. He was recalled again and again to the footlights, was serenaded, made a speech, and afterwards confessed that he was quite happy over it all. The play spread abroad his fame throughout the Scandinavian countries and Denmark. Its popularity is scarcely explainable to-day, except from the fact that the play is in the line of classic Norwegian development. The extravagant and melodramatic plot possesses no permanent human interest; and the only noteworthy feature it possesses, in its relation to the development of Ibsen's art, is the situation which Ibsen employs again and again in later plays; the placing of a man between two women who struggle for his love, the one fiery and passionate, the other gentle and tender. It lends confirmation to the belief that, instead of enlarging his horizon, Ibsen tends rather to intensification of method—digging deeper and ever deeper into the sub-stratum of human feeling and human consciousness.

We come now to a turning-point in Ibsen's career as a dramatic artist. He has abandoned forever the romantic ballad—it has given him all it had to give. His career as director of the theatre at Bergen is at an end, and he has only one notable play to his credit—*Lady Inger of Oestraat*. And yet this five-years' apprenticeship at Bergen may be said to mark

the turning point in Ibsen's life. This blind step in the dark, taken in the magnificent rashness of youth, was the definitive step in his career as a dramatist. The Bergen apprenticeship enabled him, through experimenting with and discarding the technical methods of others, to discover his own individual and unique methods of dramatic procedure. Like an Antoine, a Clarète or a Granville Barker, Ibsen has learned, through precept, practice and example, the arts of theatre management, of stage technique, of dramaturgy. From this time forward we discover in Ibsen, not a Norwegian bungler in drama, but a great world-dramatist. Ibsen's drama now belongs to the future.

## VI

In 1857, Ibsen was appointed director of the Norwegian Theatre at Christiania. Now began another six-year period, the most painful in Ibsen's life. He had to fight not only for the existence of himself and his family—for he was married in 1856—but actually for the very existence of Norwegian poetry and the Norwegian stage. While looking for a subject that would display, in broad and primitive forms, the clash of characters in an ancient Norwegian family, he fell upon the *Volsung Saga*. By dra-



matizing a particular episode, he hoped to raise the national epic material to a higher degree of artistic valuation. It is a mark of the struggle between Ibsen's realistic mind and his romantic temperament that the aim evolved was to present, not the mythic world but the life of Norway in primitive times. Ibsen accomplished his purpose by employing prose as a medium instead of poetry, discovering in the event that the play was more poetical in prose than in verse. The result was an authentically dramatic, finely executed achievement.

*The Vikings at Helgeland* is the tragedy of the man who has taken the credit of another man's deed—a theme of vicarious sacrifice exploited by Rostand with notable success in *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In Ibsen's play, the strong, passionate heroic woman, Hjördis, whose father was killed in a viking raid, has lived from girlhood in the conqueror's home. Sigurd and his friend Gunnar come, see and are conquered by her; she, secretly loving the fearless Sigurd, promises herself to him who kills the bear. Disguised in Gunnar's armor, Sigurd wins the maid for his friend.

The tragedy begins when Gunnar, committed to the secret, has to suffer the torment of listening to the praises of his deed—a deed which he has not only not performed, but which he was incapable of performing. His secret becomes a ghastly burden. The tragedy sharpens in intensity when, as Gunnar's

wife, Hjördis discovers that the man she loves was he who really won her. There is a limit to self-sacrifice, she proudly tells him—and no man may with impunity give to his friend the woman he loves. Hjördis is most cruel to him she most loves, slaying him that they may go out together upon the winds.

There is something of the sublime horror of ancient days—as well as of its primitive strength and unsullied emotions—in this play. And doubtless Ibsen meant it as a tonic, an invigorant for a generation sated with cheap emotionalism, rank insincerity and forgotten loyalty. The play aroused violent opposition, was decried on all sides, and left Ibsen more depressed than ever. Next he turns to *The Comedy of Love*—only to rouse a tempest about his ears. Once more he returns to the sagas, in the hope of bettering his former effort and winning real renown. The new play is known as *The Pretenders*, though a more correct translation would be *The Stuff from which Kings are Made*. Here we have the tragedy of the man who steals the thought of another—just as, in *The Vikings at Helgeland*, we have the tragedy of the man who steals the deed of another. Georg Brandes says in a classic passage:

“In *The Pretenders* two figures again stand opposed to one another as the superior and the inferior beings. . . . It is towards this contrast

that Ibsen has hitherto unconsciously directed his endeavors, just as Nature feels her way in her blind preliminary attempts to form new types. Hakon and Skule are pretenders to the same throne, scions of royalty out of which a king may be made. But the first is the incarnation of fortune, victory, right and confidence; the second—the principal figure in the play, masterly in its truth and originality—is the brooder, a prey to inward struggles and endless distrust, brave and ambitious, with perhaps every qualification and claim to be king, but lacking the inexpressible somewhat that would give a value to all the rest. . . . ‘I am a king’s arm,’ he says, ‘mayhap a king’s brain as well; but Hakon is the whole king.’ ‘You have wisdom and courage, and all noble gifts of the mind,’ says Hakon to him; ‘you are born to stand nearest a king, but not to be a king yourself.’ ”

There is one signally momentous passage in the play deserving of quotation. Skule eagerly asks the old Skald:—

“What gift do I need to become a King?”  
“My lord,” replied the Skald, “you *are* a King!”

Then Skule utters the thought that is eating its cankerous way into his soul:

“Have you, at all times, full faith that you *are* a Skald?”

Here is a strange mingling of that truth and poetry, that *Wahrheit* and *Dichtung* of which Goethe wrote so eloquently. As Gosse says: “It is

by no means extravagant to see in the noble emulation of the dukes in *The Pretenders* some reflection of Ibsen's attitude toward the youthful and brilliant Björnson. The luminous self-reliance, the ardor and confidence and good fortune of Björnson-Hakon could not but offer a violent contrast with the gloom and hesitation, the sick revulsions of hope and final lack of conviction of Ibsen-Skule. . . . 'The luckiest man is the greatest man,' says Bishop Nicholas in the play, and Björnson seemed in those melancholy years as lucky as Ibsen was unlucky." Björnson was upborne by the favor of the populace; Ibsen worked without favor and without support. And yet, as Rudyard Kipling says, "He rides fastest who rides alone." This was Ibsen's darkest hour. The end is not yet.

## VII

Henrik Ibsen began his trilogy of satires with a play as provocative, as piquant as it is satirical. It is the work of a prisoner of hope, a baffled idealist: Ibsen is seeking to chastise his own Norwegian people by painting them just as he saw them, without fear or favor. A daring novel, *The Sheriff's Daughter*, by Camilla Collett, was creating a profound sensation in Norway. This novel, a harbinger of the new thought movement in Norway, was

a vigorous attack upon the marriage of convenience. No marriage not based on love can be happy, was the book's thesis. Depressed by meagre success, harassed by financial embarrassment, Ibsen was in no mood to accept so roseate a view belied so utterly by the conditions he saw around him. No play of Ibsen's has been handled so crudely by the critics as *The Comedy of Love*, this most diaphanous structure of light satire. *Svanhild*, now for the first time spread before us in the *Nachgelassene Schriften*, was begun as early as 1856; the play was finally completed in 1862. It was begun in prose, and completed in rhymed iambics; and the original draft contains nothing critically noteworthy. But it is of the highest importance to note that in a letter to Clemens Petersen (Aug. 10, 1863), lately published, Ibsen frankly confesses: "As to *The Comedy of Love*, I can assure you that if ever it was necessary for an author to rid himself of a sentiment and a subject it was so with me when I began that work." *The Comedy of Love* is the image of an evanescent mood: it was Ibsen's way of getting rid of it.

Perhaps the most noteworthy passage in the play, is a scene which may have furnished the model for the "auction-scene" in Bernard Shaw's *Candida*. Guldstad, the wealthy, shrewd old merchant, gives the counsel of golden common sense, which induces the lovers—the poet Falk and the idealistic Svanhild—to part.

Hear a golden counsel, then.  
Use your experience; watch your fellow-men,  
How every loving couple struts and swaggers  
Like millionaires among a world of beggars.  
They scamper to the altar, lad and lass,  
They make a home, and drunk with exultation,  
Dwell for awhile within its walls of glass.  
Then comes the day of reckoning—but, alas,  
They're bankrupt, and their house in liquidation!  
Bankrupt the bloom of youth on woman's brow;  
Bankrupt the flower of passion in her breast,  
Bankrupt the husband's battle-ardor now,  
Bankrupt each spark of passion he possessed.  
Bankrupt the whole estate, below, above—  
And yet this broken pair were once confessed  
A first-class house in all the wares of love.

Tennyson says that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Ibsen maintained—not in a general philosophical way, but with respect to the conditions he saw immediately around him—that it is better, if youthfully, romantically in love, to separate, rather than to marry. Ibsen is in agreement with the brilliant Frenchman who asserted that all comedies end with a wedding, because it is then that the tragedy begins! Ibsen was so much the observer, with the added divination of the poet, that in this play he almost achieved the distinction of a philosophical distillation of the real essence of love. Mirrored in his mood at the moment, love appeared to Ibsen as one of two things:

either a dead, dull thing, a mere surfeit; or else the evanescent flame of the moment, or, to change the figure, a glass of champagne upon the board of life. There was, in Ibsen's vision, another deeper love, which he found not until *When We Dead Awaken*—if Falk and Svanhild had only possessed the true faith in the self-sustaining power of love, Ibsen means, they would never have parted. This is the materialistic flaw in the structure of modern life. For the inevitable erotic illusion, Ibsen betrays no scorn; he reserves his contempt for the decay of character consequent to the acceptance of the vulgar convention of the legal union, by this frail and weak-hearted generation. The play is a comedy, *not* a philosophy; Ibsen sought only, to use his own accurate words, to represent "the contrast in our present state of society between the actual and the ideal in all that relates to love and marriage." It is futile and beside the mark to point out Ibsen's one-sidedness in making no allowance for the vast number of happy marriages based upon love, and in valuing the memory of a beautiful love above the humanizing responsibilities of consecrated marriage, the enfranchising bonds of partnership and parenthood. How stupid—in face of the parting between Falk and Svanhild:—

*Falk* (softly to Svanhild)—

God bless thee, bride of my life's dawn;  
Where'er I be, to nobler deed thou'lt wake me.

*Svanhild* (looks after him a moment, then says softly, firmly:)

Now over is my life, by lea and lawn.  
The leaves are falling—now the world may take me.

Ibsen clearly points out that, in the life around him, creature comforts are valued far above the sustaining power of love—and when Georg Brandes, urging the claim of ideal engagements eventuating in ideal marriages, remarked: "You know there are sound potatoes and rotten potatoes in the world," Ibsen replied with a cynicism, as light as it is sharp: "I am afraid none of the sound potatoes have come under my observation." The tone of *The Comedy of Love* as an attack on love and marriage branded Ibsen as an "immoral" (!) writer—a charge which a lifetime of blameless conduct alone could dissipate.

From Rome, after a space, came a momentous message. The frustration of an idealistic human spirit, by the savage irony of reality, is the theme of *Brand*; and its artistic temper at once ranges it in the category of *Hamlet*, *Manfred* and *Faust*. The epic-fragment discovered by Pontoppidan and recently published, with its souvenirs of Heiberg and Welhaven, prompts the wish that Ibsen had adhered to his original intention. For whatever the medium, *Brand* is essentially an epic. Brand himself is a figure of heroic, even Titanic mould, arraigning all compromise with his ideals of Christianity be-



fore the bar of heaven. The God of his worship is the God of the Old Testament, animated with wrath and indignation against a faltering generation. What Brand (like Ibsen himself—who confessed that he *was* Brand, in his best moments) desires is so radical a revolution of the spirit of man that the spirit of compromise in man will be chained and buried forever from sight. As priest and man, he is determined to champion at any and all costs the cause of things, not as they seem, not even as they are, but as he is convinced they *should* be. Man's self-development is his highest duty; concessions to the world take the form of evil and temptation. The only way to develop one's self is to stand free and to stand alone. Brand's motto, "All or Nothing," is the logical epitome of his point of view.

*Brand* is a terrible arraignment of the half-hearted pietism of the Norwegian people. And yet Brand's ideal of pietism is an ideal unattainable: it cannot survive the shock of reality. Brand is the pictorial projection of a splendidly hopeless, idealistic dream. Cervantes in *Don Quixote* portrayed the bankruptcy of chivalry in collision with the brutal facts of life; so Ibsen in *Brand* portrays the bankruptcy of the pietistic ideal as soon as it is brought into collision with sordid reality. As soon as he put his faith to the test of acts, Brand brought nothing but suffering upon all whom he

loved; he had reared a castle in the clouds which none—not even himself—might inhabit.

In *Peer Gynt*, the brilliant, formless, parti-colored pendant to *Brand*, Ibsen shows to the world the other side of the Norwegian people. *Peer Gynt* has for ideal the utterly selfish gratification of his own individuality—regardless of all the rest of the world. He glows with the desire to be romantic, but he has not the will or the courage to do the romantic thing; so he takes it all out in romancing. His ideal of man is a sort of demi-god and super-braggart combined, of all-conquering will—a masterful fellow, a “magerful man,” a fascinating dog whom no woman can refuse, a born fighter, a gallant knight. But *Peer* soon discovers that no such bird of paradise has ever sung in the world-concert. The only thing left for him, in his disillusion, is to weave illusions about himself, and even to imagine that he is the hero of his own romantic lies. *Peer Gynt* is the tremendous prototype of Sentimental Tommy. After many adventures, by sea and by land, *Peer* returns home in the end, a pitiful and hopeless failure in all save worldly goods. He cannot gain admittance even to hell; for even as a sinner, he is only second rate. He has lacked the greatness to sin greatly. He must go at once into the crucible of the great Button-Moulder, be melted down and cast again. For, after all, he is only base metal.

Ibsen's effort is to arouse the world, to open its eyes to a freer, richer future, to point out the need for ridding itself of false ideals—ideals which cannot be realized in acts. Not the least strange feature of Ibsen's career is the fact that he started from the innermost depths of romanticism. Only gradually and painfully did he work himself up and out of the slough of romanticism on to the firm ground of realism, and into the pure air of freedom and truth. Ibsen has come now to the end of romanticism. All his discouragements and disappointments, the apathy, indifference and hostility he experienced, bred in him a spirit of discontent and revolt. This revolt is going to find expression in a long and detailed exposure of modern civilization, its venerable and antiquated institutions, its shallow and outworn ideals, its feebly conventional morals, its pettiness, weakness and hypocrisy. Hereafter we see Ibsen probing the secrets of the age. "My vocation is to question, not to answer;" so he expresses the world-thoughts that are in the air, voices the spirit of the age, taps the moral coin of the era only to find it debased or counterfeit. Ibsen now begins a new career: the breach with his country sounds in his sardonic lines, written in July, 1872:

My countrymen, who filled for me deep bowls  
Of wholesome bitter medicine, such as gave  
The poet, on the margin of his grave,  
Fresh force to fight where broken twilight rolls,—

My countrymen, who sped me o'er the wave,  
An exile, with my griefs for pilgrim-robcs,  
My fears for burdens, doubts for staff, to roam,—  
From the wide world I send you greeting home.

\* \* \* \* \*

I send you thanks for gifts that help and harden,  
Thanks for each hour of purifying pain;  
Each plant that springs in my poetic garden  
Is rooted where your harshness poured its rain;  
Each shoot in which it blooms and burgeons forth  
It owes to that gray weather from the North;  
The sun relaxes, but the fog secures!  
My country, thanks! My life's best gifts were  
yours.

## VIII

Artificial as it is under any exalted standard of dramatic art, *The League of Youth* marks a point of departure of incalculable importance in Ibsen's career. At last he has discovered the true medium for the society comedy—the terse, pliant prose of daily speech. While this play exhibits all the earmarks of Ibsen's apprenticeship in the school of Scribe, it betrays marked independence and originality—in the realistic coloring of the dialogue, the prosaic naturalness of the conversations, and the omission of all monologues and asides. It is what Ibsen calls a “peaceful work”—the product, not of wine

and walnuts, so to speak, but of Budweiser and Bologna. This satire upon the prevailing political conditions in Norway is provincial, indeed suburban, in tone; and gives an excellent handle to Ibsen's detractors. No wonder it caused an uproar—being a blow at Björnson, or at least, as Ibsen claimed, at his lie-steeped clique! One cannot blame Björnson for royal indignation over what he termed Ibsen's "attempted assassination." The play is a complex of intrigues; and misunderstandings and mishaps play a large part in the action. The greatest merit of the play is its foreshadowing of the modern woman. At one point, little Selma Bratsberg vehemently exclaims: "Oh, how you have maltreated me—shamefully maltreated me, all of you together! You have always compelled me to receive, and never permitted me to give. You have never required the least sacrifice of me, nor laid upon me the slightest weight of care. When I asked to share your burdens, you put me off with a flattering jest. How I hate and detest you! You have brought me up to be dandled like a doll, and to be played with, as one plays with a child." In this speech is found the seed of that revolt against the false standard for women then in vogue. Brandes told Ibsen that the character of Selma did not have sufficient scope, and urged Ibsen to write another play to that end. Ibsen brooded over that suggestion, and in *Nora*, of *A Doll's*

*House*, he created a Selma with the wide world for scope.

One prose play intervenes between *The League of Youth* and *A Doll's House*—the play with which Ibsen conquered Germany. German critics extravagantly confessed: "We found our æsthetic creed—our young eyes were opened by it to all the theatric artificiality of the day. We trembled with joy." How strangely these words sound—in view of the theatric artificiality so patent to-day in *The Pillars of Society*, Ibsen's first attempt at the "photography by comedy" which Björnson had urged on Ibsen eight years before.

Consul Bernick, the protagonist of the play, is a pillar of society in his native town—its leading citizen and financier. His is a model home; his firm enjoys an established reputation; he himself is looked up to as a man of high honor and business integrity. But this pillar of society has for foundation the treacherous sands of sham, hypocrisy and lies. In his youth, Bernick had been guilty of grave indiscretions, financial and sexual, the blame for which he succeeded in foisting upon his brother-in-law. In his youth, Bernick betrayed the woman he loved in order to marry an heiress. He builds his house and reputation upon this insecure foundation. He lives a triple lie—to his wife, to his brother-in-law, to the sweetheart of his youth. In the end, his early sweetheart, aided by circum-

stances, brings him to a realization of the hypocrisy of his position; and he is brought sharply face to face with the alternative of silence and success, or revelation and ruin. Fortified by the noble counsel of his former sweetheart he confesses all—to his wife, and to his fellow-townsmen assembled *en masse* to do him honor. In the end, he declares that the true and faithful women are the pillars of society; but his former sweetheart replies: “No, no; the spirits of Truth and Freedom—these are the Pillars of Society.” These spirits Ibsen invokes again and again in his later plays—that truth which means unfaltering recognition of fact and unflinching facing of reality, that freedom which connotes enfranchisement from the false ideals of a false society.

As a realistic picture of modern life, *The Pillars of Society* is noteworthy; and it is deserving of record that the crucial incident of *The Indian Girl* found its origin in Samuel Plimsoll’s agitation in England, fully reflected in the press of Norway, for proper legal regulations concerning insurance upon unseaworthy crafts. As a drama, its technique is very vulnerable: Ibsen has not yet written his complete declaration of independence from the school of Scribe. Moreover, it is conventional, both in treatment and solution. Misrepresentation, evil and intrigue prevail for a time; wrong rules while waiting justice sleeps. In the end comes retribution—right prevails and truth is triumphant. But in reality

Bernick is reformed, not by conflict with fate, but by providential intervention with a sort of death-bed-repentance effect at the end. Not otherwise are reformed the fascinating villains of the Adelphi. *The Pillars of Society* is a melodrama of the morals.

In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen first definitively sounded the trumpet-call of woman's freedom. This is his first drama wholly modern in tendency. The *dénouement* is so startling, so tremendous, so anti-social that when Francisque Sarcey first saw it in Paris, he threw up his hands in horror, declaring that he didn't understand a word of it. Here, in advanced maturity of technique, we behold the struggle of the modern woman against the vitiating influence of her environment, her heredity, and the social conventions which retard her development as an individual and as a human being.

The story is so familiar that it needs no recital here. The real significance of the play consists as much in Ibsen's attitude towards the "Woman Question" as in Nora's method of solution. Ibsen entered the lists as Woman's Champion, not in a partisan spirit, but because he realized that the cause of woman was the cause of humanity. It was an evolutionary growth of his spirit from the days when he tragically pictured woman as under the necessity of self-sacrifice and service for others. The "Woman Question," with Ibsen, was not a mere question



of the vote—he wished women to secure such representation whenever her talents and sense of responsibility entitled her thereto. But to Ibsen, the “Woman Question” meant primarily the question as to the position of woman in marriage—as exemplified in *A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*. Even in the preliminary draft for *A Doll’s House*, Nora observes that the laws are made by man, and that contemporary society means a society for men, not a society for human beings. It is a mark of Ibsen’s human insight, as well as of his artistic detachment, that, in Nora, he reveals the New Woman still deeply rooted in the old Eve. She still employs all the arts of cajolery, of waywardness, of personal fascination for securing her own ends. And yet, even in the midst of that mad, despairing tarantella, we know that the old Eve is about to tear away the mask which conceals the modern woman. From Schopenhauer, Ibsen passed under the influence of the evolutionary theories of Darwin and Spencer. In *A Doll’s House*, Nora furnishes a striking illustration of the inheritance of acquired characteristics; and we feel very strongly that, in another environment, Krogstad might have been an honorable citizen of society. From the tragic spectacle of Dr. Rank, Nora first grasps the principle of hereditary responsibility; and her spiritual development springs from the fixed conviction that she can become responsible for the wel-

fare of her children only by gaining responsibility for herself and acquiring knowledge of society through contact with the great world. Environment, the treatment she has received from her father and her husband, has cultivated in her all the weaker and none of the stronger elements of her nature. She realizes, in Ibsen's own words, that everyone "shares the responsibility and guilt of the society to which he (or she!) belongs."

The continuity of Ibsen's development is strikingly revealed in one artistic quality. Later entire dramas are foreshadowed in single characters and episodes of some preceding play. John Gabriel Borkman is prefigured in Consul Bernick; the auxiliary figure of Hilda Wangel in *The Lady From the Sea* becomes the heroine of *The Master-BUILDER*; the tragic figure of Dr. Rank as the victim of parental incontinence becomes the more poignantly tragic figure of Oswald Alving in *Ghosts*. Society held up its hands in holy horror because Nora abandoned her children rather than surrender her individuality; but instead of shaking, this only confirmed, Ibsen in his conviction that "the time had come for some boundary posts to be removed." In *Ghosts*, Ibsen gives his terrible answer to the question: "Do the children really benefit by the mother's surrender in living a lie in marriage?" The conditions of Nora Helmer and Helen Alving are by no means identical; nor were any such disastrous con-

sequences prophesied for the children of the morally upright Helmer as fell to the lot of the son of the dissolute Chamberlain Alving. Nor is it at all clear that Helen Alving was acting with poise and entire sanity in throwing herself at the head of Pastor Manders. But it is perfectly clear that Helen Alving, by remaining in the hideous bonds of a bargain-and-sale marriage forced upon her by the pressure of her mother, her two aunts and her minister, committed a great wrong. And her final revolt was so subversive, so wide a swing of the pendulum from the mark of sanity, as to accentuate her feminine extravagance to the detriment of the purposed import of the play.

*Ghosts* aroused a tornado of abuse unequalled, doubtless, in the entire history of the drama since the beginning of the world. Even to-day this play is forbidden production in Great Britain; and the King's Reader of Plays, before a Parliamentary Commission, recently expressed the conviction that it would never be allowed production in Great Britain. It is generally conceded to be the strongest, most terrible play of the nineteenth century. In 1898, Otto Brahm, the distinguished German critic, wrote: "The gates to the most modern German drama were opened when *Ghosts* first appeared on a German stage." William Archer termed *Ghosts* the harbinger of the whole dramatic movement in Europe, and Georg Brandes said that it was, if

not the greatest achievement, at any rate the noblest action of the poet's career. In it, Ibsen finally concretizes his faith in the human being's right to happiness. Its basis is found, not in Kirkegaard, Schopenhauer or any European thinker, but in John Stuart Mill who, in his *Utilitarianism* (translated into Danish by Georg Brandes in 1872), posits "an existence, possibly free from sorrow and possibly rich in joy, in quality as well as in quantity." To Mill is doubtless attributable Ibsen's dramatic formulation of man's right to happiness. In dramatic technique, *Ghosts* is superb—the retrospective method of Greek tragedy brought to perfection. Ibsen gives enduring dramatic exemplification to the memorable words of Maurice Maeterlinck: "We know that the dead do not die. We know that it is not in our churches they are to be found, but in the houses, the habits of us all."

When *Ghosts* awoke in Norway a positive howl of execration that resounded throughout Europe, Ibsen could restrain himself no longer. He had come to the limit of his endurance of the obloquy that had been heaped upon him ever since the days of *The Comedy of Love*. His conception of the function of the dramatist had gradually enlarged; he now unflinchingly assumed responsibility for the morals of others. Hitherto, with solemn periodicity, Ibsen's plays had followed each other at intervals of two years. *An Enemy of the People* was

conceived and executed with passionate haste in the spring and summer months of 1882. This gay, yet intense play, so humorous and yet so trenchant, is devoid of all genuine "love-interest"; it is Ibsen's most polemic play.

The impulsive, choleric Dr. Stockmann discovers that the baths of his native town, a celebrated health resort, are contaminated. Instead of possessing healing and life-giving properties, in reality the mineral water spreads contagion and disease. Scornfully disregarding the fact that the baths are the greatest source of revenue for the town, Stockmann exposes to the leaders of the community his discovery of the crime they are committing against society. But the most valued possession of the pillars of society hangs in the balance: their "graft" will dwindle to nothing, if they are forced to vast expenditure for the purpose of ascertaining and obliterating the source of contamination. With sublime effrontery, characteristic of a Tweed or a Ruef, the owners of the baths disregard Stockmann's revelations; and through clever but specious arguments, they secure the support of the majority of the community. "It will disturb business" and "threaten prosperity"—ah, what familiar words here in America! Then only does Stockmann awake to a realization that, not merely are the baths contaminated, but the very well-springs of the society in which he lives are poisoned at their sources. This he bravely and

defiantly proclaims, with all the force of a scientific muck-raker, at a tremendous mass-meeting. He is declared an enemy of the people, ostracized, stoned.

*An Enemy of the People* is Ibsen's dramatic incarnation of his gradually matured theory, that the minority is always right. He had a firm faith in that "saving remnant," the minority; he rested his hope, as he said, upon the "minority which leads the van and pushes on to points which the majority has not yet reached. It is not Public Opinion, the Majority, which improves the prevailing order of the world, but

"Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog,  
In public duty and in private thinking."

Ibsen regarded himself as a "solitary franc-tireur at the outposts"; and he wrote to Brandes from Rome on January 3, 1882: "I receive more and more corroboration of my conviction that there is something demoralizing in engaging in politics and in joining parties. It will never, in my case, be possible for me to join a party that has the majority on its side. Björnson says: 'The majority is always right.' And as a practical politician he is bound, I suppose, to say so. I, on the contrary, must of necessity say: 'The minority is always right.' "

Strangely enough, Ibsen has confessed that Björnson, as well as Jonas Lie, was in his mind when he drew the picture of the bluff, spontaneous, genial

Stockmann. Ibsen confessed to Hegel that he got along famously with Stockmann: "We agree on so many subjects. But the doctor is a more muddle-headed person than I am." He may even have had Brandes in mind, at times. But it has recently come to light that the most obvious model for Stockmann was Harald Thaulow, the father of the painter and the cousin of Henrik Wergeland. He was by nature an agitator, a reformer, who deeply loved his people and yet was continually in hot water through his effort to reform them. Only two weeks before his death, at the General Assembly of February 23, 1881, he made a violent attack upon the society known as "Dampf-Küche." He declared that there was no greater humbug in Christiania than this society, and continued for three-quarters of an hour in this strain. The colloquy which ensued, reproduced in the *Aftenpost*, leaves no doubt as to Ibsen's source for the leading feature of *An Enemy of the People*.

Thaulow: I won't permit my mouth to be shut (continues his address).

Consul Heftye: Herr Thaulow must stop!

Thaulow (reads on). Some express their disapproval by ostentatiously walking around the hall.

The president asks the assembly whether it recognizes his right to refuse Herr Thaulow the floor. Unanimous assent.

The president again requests Herr Thaulow to desist.

Thaulow: I won't permit my mouth to be shut.

President: Then we will proceed with the order of the day—

Thaulow: I will cut it very short (reads on).

Heftye: May he read on?

Thaulow (continues): "The splendid result of the Christiania 'Dampf-Küche' . . ." I'm almost through—

Heftye: At this rate the General Assembly will go to pieces.

President: I am sorry I have to interrupt Herr Thaulow. You mustn't speak—

Thaulow reads on.

Heftye: Stop—or you must leave the hall.

Thaulow: Just one word more (sinks exhausted into a chair).

The president now proceeds with the reading of the official report.

Thaulow listens grumblingly to the report, and several times makes an effort to gain a hearing.

When the opposition became too strong, he finally gave up the struggle and went away with the words: "I will have nothing more to do with you. I am tired of casting pearls before swine. This is infernal misuse among a free people in a free society. Well—my respects to you—go on, then, to your family meal!"

## IX

*The Wild Duck* is Ibsen's first step along a new path. This is true in a double sense. Heretofore,



Ibsen has been giving very positive, very defiant solutions to the questions he himself has posed. In many cases, he even goes so far as to formulate his solution of the dramatic complex in a single momentous action or even in a memorable, solitary phrase. *The Wild Duck* first fully justifies Ibsen's statement that his vocation was to question rather than to answer. No one was so sure of this as Ibsen himself; he said that, to all, this play offered "problems worth the solving." Moreover, its point of departure, in another striking phase, is proclaimed by Ibsen in the words: "This new play in some ways occupies a place apart among my productions; its method of development is in many respects divergent from that of its predecessors." To Mr. Archer, *The Wild Duck* is a consummation rather than a new departure. A strange judgment, in view not only of Ibsen's own words, but also in view of the patent fact that here, for the first time, Ibsen sets his foot in the alien path of symbolism,—that symbolism so strangely interwoven in *Rosmersholm*, so mystic in *Little Eyolf*, so magically potent in *The Lady From the Sea*! The disquieting figure of the wounded wild duck, suggested to Ibsen as a dramatic symbol by Welhaven's beautiful poem *The Sea Bird*, flutters mysteriously through this disturbing play—symbolizing now the wounded soul of Werle, now the "evil genius of the house" (baldly stated in the "forework"), now the symbolic adum-

bration of the fateful secret of Hedwig's parentage bequeathed by the old Werle to the Ekdal family.

It is usual for critics to find in *The Wild Duck* an expression of Ibsen's dark pessimism, distrust in his mission, incipient disbelief in "the claim of the ideal." It is interpreted as a reaction against the dogmatic "All or Nothing" of *Brand*, against Stockmann's cocksureness in the virtue of his mission in *An Enemy of the People*. In *The Wild Duck*, does Ibsen merely question whether "the bitter tonic-draught of truth" is the fundamental pre-requisite for the happiness and well-being of humanity, as it now is, or even as it may be for Heaven knows how long yet to come? This seems to me to be a superficial judgment. The real problem around which Ibsen's mind continually hovered was the problem, for the individual, of discovering himself in life. In the very year in which he wrote *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen spoke, not once, but twice, in letters, of "the duty and the right, of realizing one's self." Self-realization, in its amplest sense, for Ibsen, means not only the discovery of one's mission, but also the discovery of the great meaning, the great happiness even, that life holds for the individual soul. *The Wild Duck* is a dark and ironic commentary upon the wrong-headed reformer, who would turn the world upside down in a mad and stupidly meddlesome effort to realize his own extravagant ideals. This play is as little a *reduction*

*ad absurdum* of Ibsen's own doctrine and ideal of the efficacy of truth as *How He Lied to Her Husband* is a caricature of *Candida*. In Hjalmar Ekdal's attitude toward Gina is satirized the absolute moral demand of Svava Riis in Björnson's *A Glove* (September, 1883), as Elias and Koht have pointed out. And in Gregers Werle is mordantly satirized that "untutored idealism"—of which we have recently heard so much in America.

Gregers Werle is in pursuit of illusions. He is that "sick conscience" which subsequently found such memorable incarnation in Halvard Solness. He is the inevitable product of his own environment and his own heredity. In his reaction against the Life Lie of his own father, he absorbs the *idée fixe* of a mother rendered morbid and hysterical by her own domestic tragedy. With not only a grotesquely impossible mania for hero-worship but a ludicrous misapprehension of the moral bankruptcy of Hjalmar Ekdal, Gregers Werle tactlessly flourishes aloft the banner of the ideal and revels in bearing heedless witness to the truth. In his misguided efforts to force upon weaker vessels, made of common clay, that which they are unable to hold, he succeeds only in shattering them into fragments. His passion for communicating to others his "fever for doing right" leaves disaster and death in his wake. "Oh, life would be quite tolerable, after all," says Relling,—the real Ibsen speaking, undoubtedly *in propria per-*

*sona*—, “if only we could be rid of the confounded duns that keep on pestering us, in our poverty, with the claim of the ideal.”

Nowhere has Ibsen's power of minute and veracious characterization showed itself so supreme. Gregers Werle is the classic embodiment of the misguided reformer. Hjalmar Ekdal is Ibsen's most striking embodiment of the abjectly pitiable moral bankrupt, self-deceiving, self-deceived—grotesquely failing to live up to standards inconsiderately applied from without. He is the tragic figure of the average sensual man, betrayed by ideals he has not really made his own—feeding upon his illusions, those illusions by which his very peace of mind, his happiness, are conditioned. Gina Ekdal, without any ideals save the eminently materialistic, eminently prosaic desire to preserve the comfortable *status quo*, is irresistibly natural and likable—perhaps because she is so utterly *terre à terre*. The gentle Hedwig, tender, appealing, young enough to make a hero of her inhumanly selfish father, too young to detect his glaring faults, is Ibsen's most poetic feminine figure. Björnson acknowledged, after learning to know Ibsen's sister Hedwig, who served as the model for the Hedwig of the play, that he at last understood what a debt Ibsen's bent towards mysticism owed to heredity. *The Wild Duck* has been regarded as a perfect example of Ibsen's individual technique. But its most lamentable technical

fault has been succinctly pointed out by Bernard Shaw: "The logic by which Gregers Werle persuades Hedwig to kill the wild duck in order that she may be provided with a pistol to kill herself, strains my credulity."

From this time forward, Ibsen's plays concern themselves less and less with society, more and more with individual problems of character and conscience. Just as *The Wild Duck* marks the transition from realism to symbolism, so *Rosmersholm* marks the transition from society to the individual. After this point, Ibsen's dramas are no longer sociological. They are psychological, and at times psychic, concern themselves with the inner life of thought and conscience, and verge ever towards symbolism, mysticism and poetry. It is mediately true that we find the sociological Ibsen in Bernard Shaw, the symbolical Ibsen in Maurice Maeterlinck, the psychological Ibsen in Hermann Sudermann. Many years ago, Georg Brandes declared that at one period of his career, Ibsen had had a lyrical Pegasus killed under him. After reading *The Lady From the Sea*, *The Master-Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*, we realize that Brandes saw no further than the present. Wounded and dormant lay the winged steed through the middle years; but in time its strength returned, its pinions were once more unfurled, and it bore its rider over the lower slopes of later life.

In *The Wild Duck* Ibsen reaches the extreme point of his realism. Here he brings us face to face with "cheap, earthenware souls"; here he paints, in garish colors, the unromantic hero—that ludicrous contradiction in terms. At last we have the true *bourgeois* drama, dealing with the thoughts and passions, the loves and hates, the comedies and tragedies, of people such as we brush against every day in the street. The protagonist of to-day has "lost the last gleam from the sunset of the heroes." He is the hero manqué, struggling in fatal futility against the overwhelming pressure of environment, the brand of heredity, the coil of circumstance, the chains of character, the damning verdict of self-mockery, self-distrust, and self-contempt. In *Rosmersholm*, the leading characters lose none of their absorbing interest because one is a pseudo-reformer, weak-kneed if high-minded, and the other a criminal adventurer. This play brings Ibsen into juxtaposition with Nietzsche; for the real drama takes place in a spiritual region of quasi-ethical consciousness beyond good and evil.

"The call to work," wrote Ibsen on February 13, 1887, "is certainly distinguishable throughout *Rosmersholm*. But the play also deals with the struggle with himself which every serious-minded man must face in order to bring his life into harmony with his convictions. For the different spiritual functions do not develop evenly and side by side in

any human being. The acquisitive instinct hastens on from conquest to conquest. The moral consciousness, the conscience, on the other hand, is very conservative. It has deep roots and traditions in the past generally. Hence arises the conflict in the individual. But first and foremost, of course, the play is a creative work, dealing with human beings and human destinies." In this succinct exposition, Ibsen, as it were, disengages the various *leit-motifs*; from it, we may learn the motive forces of the action of the play. The call to work is less generally human than specially local: it refers more distinctly to the situation in Norway. The second *leit-motif* constitutes the play's inner meaning: the struggle to bring one's life into conformity with one's ideals—the old Ibsen struggle for self-realization. And fundamentally, the play does not so much point a conclusive moral, as exhibit a drama of the struggle of human souls, a picture of fainting and aspiring humanity.

Johannes Rosmer is a far more impressive victim of heredity, in his "tender-minded" conscience which, even in an atmosphere of pure scepticism, looks back to the revengeful standards of an Old Testament God, than ever was Oswald Alving with his tainted body. He has read John Stuart Mill; and, like Mill, has written (see the "forework") a book in which he proclaims happiness as the goal of existence. And yet he has not made the thoughts

and ideas of the new time his own; they have laid their hold on him, less by virtue of their own inherent logic and efficacy, than by reason of the influence of Rebekka West's artful insinuations. What these thoughts and ideas are, other than those of Mill, it is difficult to say; but certain it is, from the evidence of the preliminary draft, that Rosmer and Rebekka had been reading together Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1880) which appeared in a Norwegian translation in 1885-1886 under the title *Fremskridt og fattigdom*. Paul Rée's book on the genesis of conscience (1885) must have been read by Ibsen during the progress of *Rosmersholm*; Rosmer carries too many traits accentuated by Rée. The tender-minded Rosmer must have been drawn in the light of Rée's theorem: "Anyone who, from his youth up, has been thoroughly accustomed to the thought that there is a God and that it is sinful to say: 'The conception of God is absurd,' will in later life, even after his belief has turned to unbelief, seldom mention the fact and then only with reluctance and distaste."

In *Rosmersholm*, Ibsen has penetrated more deeply into the soil of human conscience than in any other of his works. He knows each one of his characters down to the last convolution of the brain, down to the ultimate fold of the soul. Rebekka West is Ibsen's most intense female figure—alike in the clarity of her vision, the scope of her purpose,



and the development of her character. She stands under the curse of the past—the past which the “white horse” of Rosmersholm mysteriously symbolizes. She scornfully holds herself superior to the obligations of conscience; and even in the end, we feel that her spirit, not her conviction, is broken. She wields every weapon of intrigue, artifice and cunning to accomplish her purpose, all under the specious guise of a champion of freedom—the freedom of truth; and yet, at last, she goes to her doom because she feels that such freedom can only be attained by one whose soul is pure. She is a radical broken upon the wheel of Rosmer’s conservatism.

Fantasy plays its part in this drama of the interior life; and Ulrik Brendel belongs in the category of the “Rat Wife” in *Little Eyolf* and “the Stranger” in *The Lady From the Sea*. He speaks with veiled wisdom in the language of a visitant from a fantastic, supersensible world—the Ibsen chorus in full swing. To those living in a country where wealth accumulates and men decay, where fortune and fame seem in themselves to be the sole aim of existence, the words of Brendel come with poignant significance: “Peter Mortensgaard has the secret of omnipotence. He can do whatever he will. For Peter Mortensgaard never wills more than he can do. Peter Mortensgaard is capable of living his life without ideals. And that, do you see—that is

just the mighty secret of action and of victory. It is the sum of the whole world's wisdom."

If Mr. Courtney is correct in positing the failure to achieve one's mission on earth as the quintessence of contemporary tragedy, then *Rosmersholm* is Ibsen's most tragic drama. It prefigures an ideal; and conditions its attainment upon the destruction of the only possible means thereto. Nothing short of Rebekka's sacrificial death can revive in Rosmer his lost faith in the possibility of ennobling humanity; and this sacrifice destroys, for him, the possibility of remaining in life and accomplishing the work, which he might now be capable of. Perplexing, tragic antinomy!

*The Lady From the Sea*, Ibsen's most genial and charming play, embodies the spiritual realization of the longings and ideals for which Ibsen's heroes continually struggle—that "something other and greater than life" that is at stake. It is a poem in psychotherapeutics, veiled in the garb of mysticism. In Haeckel's *Natürlicher Schöpfungsgeschichte*, or perhaps in Darwin's *Descent of Man*, Ibsen must have read of that fish-species, the *Amphioxus Lanceolatus*, which in his own words (in the "forework") "forms the primordial link in the evolutionary chain." *The Lady From the Sea* finds its origin in Ibsen's perhaps not wholly fantastic supposition that rudiments of it survive in human beings, or at least in the nature of some of us. The importance of

this origin is memorable. *The Lady From the Sea* stems from Darwin and Haeckel. And this fact lends additional weight to the ingenious theory of Jules de Gaultier to the effect that Ibsen's effort is to reconcile and conciliate the two biological hypotheses; the invariability of species and the mutability of organic forms. Perhaps the reason why Ibsen is less successful in bridging the chasm between the outer and the inner life is because his fundamental standpoint here is not mystical, but biological. Heretofore Ibsen has shown the individual chiefly struggling with social forces and moral standards which prevail in the world. In *The Lady From the Sea*, Ellida Wangel struggles against a force of Nature which has its rudiments deep-seated in her own nature. "The sea exercises over people the power of a mood, which works like a will," says Ibsen in his memoranda for this play. "The sea can hypnotize. Above all, Nature can. The great mystery is man's dependence upon the 'will-less'." Herein lies the explanation of Ellida's strange and dramatic struggle.

In *Rosmersholm*, Johannes and Rebekka go down together in death because they have been unable to reconcile themselves with their environment. *The Lady From the Sea* has an enfranchising, sublimating quality—showing the other side, the happy side, of the recurring problem of self-realization—Ellida's ultimate reconciliation with her environment.

In the preliminary draft, Wangel is an attorney-at-law; what a wonderfully dramatic heightening of the effect Ibsen achieves by making him a physician in the final form of the play! Wangel may be a comparatively unskilled physician of the body; but he is an incomparable physician of the soul. Through his selfless adoration for his wife, he achieves that "miracle of manly love" for which Nora Helmer longed in vain. His love for Ellida teaches him the secret of alienism: that yielding alone can help the sick soul. He employs the familiar experiment: humoring the patient's fancies, and thereby lightening the forces of the past and of nature which become a positive obsession of the unknown.

The problem lies deeper than this. Nature has its roots deeper than this: morality has behind it natural claims which transcend it. In a curious note Ibsen once made on a loose sheet of paper, he prefigures the real solution for Ellida's psychiatric obsession: "Freedom consists in securing to the individual the right to free himself—each according to his own particular need." The dramatic climax of the third act is complete and convincing, when Ellida says to Wangel, softly and trembling: "Oh! Wangel—save me from myself." Wangel opens the way for Ellida's salvation from herself by cancelling the law's bargain. He secures to her the inner, spiritual right to freedom—freedom to act upon her own responsibility. The real dramatic con-

flict of the play takes on a schematic cast; and perhaps it is the absence of any resort to physical action, in order to accentuate Ellida's crucial decision, which weakens, dramatically, the ultimate climax. Even Ibsen found it difficult to vitalize the victory of psychology over hypnosis!

*The Lady From the Sea* is Ibsen's most romantic, most poetic prose drama. Ellida is a mermaid who defies domestication, symbolizing and catching up within herself all the sheen, fluctuation and mystery of the wild, restless sea. Ibsen's symbolism is essentially romantic; and he harks back to the mysterious, nameless lover, beloved of romance throughout the history of art. "Nobody should know what he is," Ibsen said to Hoffory in a letter recently published, "just as little should anybody know who he is or what he is really called. This *uncertainty* is just the chief point in the method chosen by me for the occasion." This stranger, about whom so much romantic uncertainty hovers, seems to be the symbolic object of woman's longing for freedom, woman's tremulous and fearful passion for the unknown.

What a contrast we find in *Hedda Gabler*! Ibsen turns from imaginative poetry to irreducible fact, from mysticism to the hard coldness of electrically brilliant realism. In *The Lady From the Sea*, Ibsen's hand falters—the pronounced subplots are extraneous and subsidiary, unmotivated by vital

relation to the forward movement of the central action. In *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen's technical virtuosity once more shines out undimmed. "The title of the play is *Hedda Gabler* (not *Tesman*)", Ibsen wrote on December 4, 1890. "My intention in giving it this name was to indicate that Hedda, as a personality, is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife. It was not my desire to deal in this play with so-called problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day." *Hedda Gabler* is not a problem play: it is a portrait play; the full-length portrait, in all its cold fascination, of the most repellently attractive woman in the modern drama. Bernard Shaw once blithely said that if people knew all that a dramatist thought, they would kill him; and Ibsen, like Sargent, always means infinitely more than he says. "These are no mere portrait busts . . ." says Rubek of his sculptures. "There is something equivocal, cryptic, lurking in and behind these busts—a secret something that the people themselves cannot see." In the full-length statue of Hedda, we detect that "something equivocal, cryptic" lurking behind the dimly realized likeness to a vampire. Hedda is the horrifying image of, not the *Ewig Weibliche*, but the temporal womanly—which drives men backward

and downward. In her are the traits of the treacherous Lorelei painted by Heine—faithless, inhuman, reptilian—luring man to destruction in the sea of sensuality. She reminds us of Philip Burne-Jones's picture—with a dash of Wedekind's *Erdgeist*. And yet she excites our mournful pity, if only we are sufficiently detached to reflect that Hedda, like Rank, Oswald, Hedwig and the rest, is a victim of heredity. This woman who stems from a worn-out race is vastly interesting as a problem in eugenics; when her father married, he was already a man old in years who had drained to the dregs the cup of sensual pleasure. "Perhaps that has left its mark upon me," says Hedda significantly,—in the forework; but so direct an allusion is omitted by Ibsen in the final draft. She gives pointed significance to the Biblical aphorism: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes; and the teeth of the children are set on edge." The appositeness of the phrase is immense: Hedda's tastes are all set on edge. With all the gifts that life can give, Hedda is the incarnation of ennui. Her tragedy is not that she fails to achieve her mission, but that she has no mission to achieve.

From the little model of Gossensass, Ibsen perhaps learned one trait for Hedda: that her desire to win the adoration of others is not for the sake of adoration, but for the thrill which the sense of possession and domination over others awakens in

her. The other characters—the dæmonic Lövborg, self-pitying, self-destroyed; Tesman, the quintessence of the methodical second-hand; Thea, this second childish Nora whose experiment so piteously fails—all dwindle into insignificance in the face of the characterless personality of Hedda. With intricately lascivious instincts, the sensual *stigmata* of a degenerate father, Hedda “hath already committed adultery in her heart.” But the fear of the world’s judgment mocks and terrifies her; she lacks the courage even of her own instincts. The play has been aptly termed the picture of a condition, not an action; and Ibsen has shown the utter depravity of Hedda by laying bare her distorted soul at the very moment when woman’s instincts are most sacred—in the face of coming motherhood. Flaubert’s words, of an earlier day, give a final judgment of the marvellous art of Ibsen as displayed in this terrible play: “The author in his work must be like God in the universe, present everywhere, and visible nowhere; art being a second nature, the creator of this nature must act by an analogous procedure; must make us feel in all the atoms, under all aspects, an impassibility secret, infinite; the effect for the spectator must be a species of amazement. How is it all done? one must say, and one feels shattered without knowing why . . .”



## X

"You are essentially right," wrote Ibsen to Count Prozor in March, 1900, "when you say that the series which closes with the Epilogue (*When We Dead Awaken*) began with *The Master-BUILDER*." And yet it must be realized that the "new method," upon which Ibsen relied in his later years, really began with *The Lady From the Sea*; and it is in this very play that Ibsen's master hand first wavers. Ibsen seems slowly to lose his powers when he leaves the domain of social relationship, and enters the untried fields of hypnotism and supernatural phenomena. And yet it cannot be denied that *The Master-BUILDER* is, of all Ibsen's plays, the densest in content, the one most provocative to a rich and ever richer measure of interpretation. Goethe once said he was inclined to believe that the more "incommensurable" a work of art, the greater it is likely to prove. *Incommensurable* is the magic word for *The Master-BUILDER*. If the meaning of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *King Lear* could be explained in a few words, it is reasonable to conclude that they would not rank as three of the greatest dramas ever written. In them are magic "over-tones," muted harmonics, which can be heard only by ears delicately

attuned to their music. It is this profound and elusive quality, this power of stimulating the far reaches of mentality and imagination, which informs and irradiates *The Master-BUILDER*. No one will ever see down all the dim vistas of the imagination opened up by the speculative and brooding Hamlet, the crime-obsessed Macbeth, the palsied prophet of a cosmic ruin, King Lear, and the tottering idealist Solness, sent climbing to his fall.

*The Master-BUILDER* reveals Ibsen hovering fascinated around the problem to which Nietzsche devoted his life—a problem with which Ibsen had occupied himself before, and independently of Nietzsche. The motto of *The Master-BUILDER* might well be the words of Browning in *Andrea del Sarto*:

“A man’s reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what’s a heaven for.”

And yet it is no heaven for which Solness longs, but that savage mundane time, that era of the “roaming blond beast,” when man’s instincts shall be given feral freedom. He aspires to live in the fierce light of the high noon of egoism—the day of Zarathustra, unbecclouded by the restraints of conscience. *The Master-BUILDER* is Ibsen’s true tragedy of the guilty conscience. Hilda, naïve, fresh, imperious, is Ibsen’s fascinating projection of the Superwoman in spirit: a keen-eyed bird of prey, like a young falcon pouncing upon its marked-down vic-

tim. And yet in the end, like Rebekka, her predatory instinct wavers before the imminent sense of moral responsibility. Solness, like Rosmer, sets too great store by that "glad guiltlessness" of the moral conservative, ever to do more than fail nobly. He believes, this mystic epileptic, that some people are "elect"; that a certain "grace" is vouchsafed to them, whereby they may, by concentrating all the forces of their being upon the desired end, succeed in achieving it. Yet one cannot accomplish great things alone: one must call to his aid mysterious powers, "helpers and servers," from the very depths of his being. These come forth and subject themselves to the master will. This is what people mean by having *Luck*. And yet, this master over the destinies of others, finally, tragically fails; for he is neither master of himself nor free from the disquieting pangs of a sick conscience. "Let us not invoke the illimitable law of the universe, the intentions of history, the will of the worlds, the justice of the stars," says Maeterlinck in his essay on *Luck*. "These powers exist: we submit to them, as we submit to the might of the sun. But they act without knowing us; and within the wide circle of their influence there remains to us still a liberty that is probably immense. They have better work on hand than to be forever bending over us to lift a blade of grass or drop a leaf in the little paths of our ant-hill. Since we ourselves are here the persons

concerned, it is, I imagine, *within ourselves* that the key of the mystery shall be found; for it is probable that every creature carries within him the best solution of the problem that he presents."

Ibsen's last three dramas exhibit a gradual loosening of the dramatist's hold upon vitally dramatic phases of human existence. Ibsen recedes farther and farther from the stage, and penetrates ever deeper into spheres of moral contemplation, self-examination, and introspection—"wild with all regret." *Little Eyolf* is a poignant study of the mental reactions from the problem of moral responsibility set up in the souls of a husband and wife through the neglect and loss of their little son, and the consequent struggles of conscience. It is an essay upon the evolution of the moral consciousness, rather than a drama for the stage. *John Gabriel Borkman* is Ibsen's most quiescent, most perfectly static drama. One may best describe it as an evocation of a state of mind. Ibsen here paints, in fadeless colors, the peculiarly modern type of the megalomaniac, the logical product of the industrial brigandage of the late nineteenth century. Borkman is a wounded Napoleon of finance shown in the last phase, fretting out his great mad soul in the St. Helena of his little room. He is the tragic victim of colossal egoism; the Nietzschean exemplar of the "higher morality" shattered upon the rock of

inexorable legal justice. *When We Dead Awaken*, Ibsen's sad epilogue, is at once a Calvary and a Resurrection. Like Nietzsche, Ibsen burned for great exhibitions of full-blooded egoism, aspired to tremendous struggles for that moral freedom which is beyond good and evil. And yet, like Solness, neither could climb as high as he built. In the life of daily actuality both were incapable of standing "high and free." Nietzsche's life and letters show it only too clearly; Ibsen's life, his experience with the little falcon of Gossensass, his moral reflections poured out in his latest plays, are all too circumstantial. In Rebekka West, in Hedda Gabler, in Halvard Solness, in Hilda Wangen, we see the nascent and maturing impulses of the "Wille zur Macht"; but Ibsen breaks down upon the frontiers of the kingdom, he can never escape the eternal question: Has one the moral right? *When We Dead Awaken* is the tragedy of life's disillusion: the discovery when it is too late that life's best gifts have been wasted in pursuit of the illusory, rather than of the enduring real. Great is Eros; and Ibsen, even Ibsen, is his prophet. The lesson of *When We Dead Awaken*, perhaps the meaning of Ibsen's "high, painful happiness" in old age, the hopeless longing for the irrevocably unattainable, is caught up in Robert Browning's memorable words from *Youth and Art*:

"Each life's unfulfilled, you see,  
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:  
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,  
Starved, feasted, despaired, been happy,  
And nobody calls you a dunce,  
And people suppose me clever:  
This could not have happened once,  
And we missed it, lost it forever."

## XI

Exaggeration lurks in the statement that Henrik Ibsen laid the foundations of a new school of art by enlisting naturalism in the service of social reforms. Rather is it true that, by veracious portraiture of contemporary life, Ibsen sought the moral regeneration of the individual, and, indirectly, of society. The ideal is the eternal sovereign of the palace of life. Man perishes, but the ideal endures. "The ideal is dead, long live the ideal!" is the epitome of all human progress. In the evolutionary trend of human progress Ibsen rested his profoundest hope. The charge of nihilism he resented with the utmost bitterness. His heresy consisted in regarding morality as fluid, evolutionary; he insisted that ideals were functions of civilization. "It has been asserted on various occasions that I am a pessi-

mist," Ibsen once remarked. "So I am to this extent—that I do not believe human ideals to be eternal. But I am also an optimist, for I believe firmly in the power of those ideals to propagate and develop." The cry of progress, in all ages, is the disillusioned cry of one of Ibsen's own characters: "The old beauty is no longer beautiful, the new truth no longer true." Ibsen preferred to dedicate himself to the future; he sacrificed friends because he regarded them as an expensive luxury, and once was heard to quote approvingly Arthur Symonds' line: "The long, intolerable monotony of friends." It is always the future in which Ibsen puts his trust; and historical optimism describes his personal angle of vision. Like Nietzsche's fierce prophet Zarathustra, Ibsen might well say of himself: "I am of to-day and of the past; but something is within me that is of to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow, and the far future."

In matters of conduct, Ibsen has no golden rule for the governance of society. Bernard Shaw says of Ibsen's philosophy: "The golden rule is that there is no golden rule." Individual responsibility is the sole and ultimate test of conduct. Ibsen's whole ideal of life may be expressed in the words of Polonius in *Hamlet*:

To thine own self be true  
And it doth follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Ibsen advocates the naked assertion of the human will; but he never escapes the unsolved problem of moral right.

His own Brand implacably declares:

Beggar or rich,—with all my soul  
I *will*; and that one thing's the whole.

And yet Brand is Ibsen's most colossal, most tragic failure. Self-realization through conscious self-examination and active assertion of the human will—this is the lesson of the Ibsenic dramas. Ibsen is an evolutionist; and evolution teaches, if indirectly, that self-development, self-realization, if you will, should be the aim, both of the individual and of the race. "The expression of our own individuality is our first duty," Ibsen once said; and this doctrine he has exemplified in all his social dramas. If only every man be true to himself, if only every individual will seek his own highest development, there need be no fear for the future. It is in that future that the "third kingdom" shall come. Ibsen once rose at a banquet and, in a toast as holy as a benediction, as solemn as a sacrifice, drank deep to *das Werdende, das Kommende*. When someone once remarked to Ibsen, in his latter years, that he would be fully understood in the distant future, Ibsen eagerly replied: "*Ja, wenn wir das nur glauben könnten!*"— Yes, if we only could believe *that*!

What Ibsen desired was a revolution of the spirit



of man. He fully recognized the moral quality of all human experience. And morality, as Nordau shrewdly puts it, is essentially optimistic, presupposing conscious and rational efforts towards the realization of the maximum of human happiness. With the force of the moral ever at work within him, Ibsen has taught us in the school of our own lives. Before us he has held the mirror of his artworks; and therein we have recognized, sometimes with amazement, sometimes with horrified fascination, sometimes with cursings and revilings, our own moral features, our own spiritual lineaments. None but ourselves have we met on the highway of fate. As Goethe said of Molière, so say we of Ibsen: he has chastized us by painting us just as we are. His appeal is to the restless, disturbing life of our own day. And his dramas are his tentatives at the question which Tolstoi claims Shakspeare never consciously proposed to himself: "What are we alive for?"

Ibsen's plays, his greatest plays, are universal because they are laid in the inner life, the region of moral consciousness. His whole drama, from one aspect, may be regarded as a microscopic analysis of the morbid self-consciousness of modern life. The immediate effect of Ibsen's plays is to awaken thought, to induce reflection, to compel people to analyze and ponder grave questions of individual and social morality. Here we have a striking ex-

ample of that desiderated publicity so widely heralded to-day as the salvation of the business and commercial honor of democratic government. Ibsen does not summon to immediate action: his appeal to what we are accustomed to call "the passions" is practically nil. His appeal is to that great and growing moral passion for social enlightenment which is permeating the entire civilized world. Ibsen starts within the individual a train of meditation and reflection which may alter a life, which may even influence the whole world. Emerson says: *To think is to act.*

Ibsen once said: "It should be the endeavor of every dramatist to improve the prevailing order of the world." Ibsen's aim is to aid in the perfecting of individual and civil life. It seems, indeed, as Brunetière says, that we of to-day are marching toward the socialization, the moralization of literature. Since Ibsen has lived and written, literature has thrilled with a new joy—the passion for individual self-realization, the passion for a more just and perfect social order.

*HENRIK IBSEN*

THE GENESIS  
OF  
HIS DRAMAS

*"To dramatize is to see."*

*Henrik Ibsen to Johann Paulsen.*

## I

Like Goethe, like George Eliot, Henrik Ibsen was that rarest of products, an artistic temperament endowed with a scientific brain. Alongside of Edgar Allan Poe, Ibsen must be ranked as a strange composite of scientific worker and artistic thinker. With unexampled frankness, he once likened himself to a surgeon holding the feverish pulse of society in the interests of universal sanity. And yet his art seems like the work of a magician; and about the composition of his well-nigh flawless plays there is something of the air of prestidigitation. The cloak of mystery in which he veiled himself from all the world, even from his wife and son, well served Ibsen's purpose of exciting endless speculations as to the manner of creation of those marvellous dramas which give positive character and quality to the age in which we live.

When Ibsen was incubating the ideas for a new play, he displayed the most delicate art of finesse in directing the conversation of everyone to the theme over which he was brooding, without leading

the speakers to suspect his own vital interest therein. From his wife, Ibsen jealously concealed every faintest indication of his dramatic "whimsies" as he was fond of calling them; but once the play was entirely finished, she it was who read it first. On one occasion, his wife and son were very curious about the new play, concerning which Ibsen had let fall not the slightest hint. One day, on leaving the *coupé* at the station, Ibsen dropped a tiny piece of paper, which his wife surreptitiously picked up. Upon it was written: "The doctor says——" that was all. Having confided to Sigurd, in advance, her playful intention of teasing Ibsen, she knowingly remarked to him: "What sort of doctor is that who takes part in your new play? He certainly has many interesting things to say!" For a moment, Ibsen was speechless with amazement and rage. Then the deluge: What was the meaning of this? Was he no longer secure in his own home? Surrounded by spies? His desk rifled, his sanctuary defiled? Imagine the silent humiliation with which he heard the true explanation!

At last, the secrets of this abnormally secretive genius have been given to the world. And perhaps no more interesting, no more unique, no more novel documents in the field of literary evolution have ever been given to the world. "The doctor says——" read that enigmatic slip which so piqued Fru Ibsen's curiosity. It is an enigma no longer, for in the vol-

umes of his *Nachgelassene Schriften* the Doctor has indeed spoken.

At several periods in his career, Ibsen contemplated writing an autobiographical account of the outward and inward conditions under which each one of his works came into being. Discreet and taciturn as he was by nature and by cultivation, Ibsen yet realized the advisability of some form of concession to the vastly greedy public who resented his extreme reserve and were genuinely interested in learning the history of the psychological evolution of the great dramatist. Delighting in a sphinx-like attitude and deliberately fostering the accumulating legends of his mysterious wizardry, Ibsen wished to tell only of the circumstances and conditions under which he wrote, "observing the utmost discretion, and leaving a wide field for all kinds of surmises." Unfortunately for the world, Frederik Hegel, Ibsen's publisher, dissuaded him from his unusually suggestive project. The experiment with *Catiline* had aroused the public interest; to do the same for all his plays seemed to Ibsen eminently worth while. This idea of writing some form of autobiography seems for many years to have lurked just below the surface of Ibsen's mind. The divergence of opinion in regard to certain of his works, the repeated assertions by the critics of the contradictoriness of his philosophy and its lack of any sort of logical continuity, impressed Ibsen with the necessity of writing

a book dealing with the gradual development of his mind and exhibiting the intimate connection between the philosophical and psychological motives of his successive plays. "In reality," he once confessed to Lorentz Dietrichson, "my development is thoroughly consecutive. I myself can indicate the various threads in the whole course of my development, the unity of my ideas, and their gradual evolution, and I am on the point of writing down some notes, which shall prove to the world that I am the same person to-day that I was on the day I first found myself." His little book, of from 160 to 200 pages, and to be entitled *From Skien to Norway*, has never come to light. Certain it is that for some time prior to November, 1881, he had been working upon this book, portions of which he actually offered to Olaf Skavlan for his magazine *Nyt Tidsskrift*. In lieu of that work, now appear the precious volumes (three in the Scandinavian, four in the German edition) of his *Nachgelassene Schriften*. There can be little question that these volumes, exhibiting as they do the intricate workings of Ibsen's mind in the actual process of the composition of his plays, are of far more universal and permanent interest than any form of autobiography or self-analysis he may have contemplated or even, in part, committed to writing. It cannot be said that the few examples we have of Ibsen's attempts at critical self-analysis are particularly successful, or, indeed—to the critical



student—wholly convincing. There lurks behind them something of the equivocal and the disingenuous—for Ibsen had a way of denying, when charged with it by the critics, the most patent indebtedness to others.

## II

To the human mind there is an indescribable fascination in searching out the secrets of the great masters of literature in the composition of their masterpieces. Perhaps the poet, as Poe suggests, voluntarily encourages the popular opinion that he composes in a series of lightning-flashes of ecstatic intuition:

“his eye in a fine frenzy rolling.”

Incidents in support of this fantastic and sentimental conception frequently run the gamut of publicity; and strange stories of magic feats of composition impress alike the sceptical and the credulous. Long and elaborate works of art require profound reflection, minute analysis and prolonged study. To peep into the workshop of the great master's brain and assist at the precise balancing of the arguments *pro* and *con*, to observe how an idea first finds lodgment in the brain, and to note the gradual symmetrical accretion of the fundamental nuclei for the

final creation—this is a privilege that has perhaps never fully been realized by any observer. Poe, for the first time in the world's history, elaborates the various mental processes, the successive reflections, by which a poet—himself—arrives at the philosophical and structural bases of a poetic masterpiece—*The Raven*. He draws the curtain and lets the people take a peep behind the scenes

at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought—at the true purposes seized only at the last moment—at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view—at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable—at the cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions—the tackle for scene-shifting—the step-ladders and demon-traps—the cock's feathers, which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrio*.

So lucid, so logical is Poe's analysis of the considerations which gave him the fundamental motives for *The Raven*, that it has been customary for the critics to point out the discrepancy between Poe's cold-bloodedly scientific explanation and the romantic glamor of his magic poetry. The world has been inclined to judge Poe's exposition as a brilliant scientific analysis of poetic intuition and inspiration—*after the fact*—a mathematical recreation in the category of cipher-solving. And yet, there is good

reason for believing that Poe, with his marvellous faculty of analysis, must have experienced some such succession of mental states as those he so succinctly describes, though doubtless not in the elaborately articulated and logical sequence upon which he lays so much stress. Even granting the validity of all that he says, he still holds something back. We have not yet plucked the heart out of his mystery; the last veil is yet unpierced, the veil which conceals the inner shrine of his poetic genius—the secrets of his haunting music, his dæmonic magic, his creative imagination.

Nothing so piques the fancy as the image of the great master-craftsman spinning out the threads of his creative imagination and weaving the magic patterns of human life which shall enrapture thousands in that palace of light and sound, the theatre. The curiosity of the inquisitive has recently been given official sanction by a great educational institution—in the case of the investigations, by Hodell, of that “Yellow Book” which first awoke in Robert Browning the idea of the many-sided complex of confession, recrimination and exculpation embodied in *The Ring and the Book*. The documents which Henrik Ibsen, the greatest dramatic craftsman since Molière, religiously preserved and which are now brought to light, at last furnish to the world the most elaborate, most veraciously authentic record of the evolutionary genesis of the masterpieces of a

great genius, that the world has ever known. These literary remains, be it noted, consist not of Ibsen's possibly supposititious accounts of the brain processes which gave rise to his dramaturgic masterpieces, but of the actual documental memoranda of the successive states of Ibsen's mind in the creation and development of his plays. Here we find the first original jottings of the thoughts which clustered together around some burning point in modern social philosophy; the original scenarios which project a vivid picture *in petto* of the dramatic conjuncture; the genetic states of mind through which Ibsen passed in creating and re-creating human experience; and finally the penultimate drafts of his plays, just prior to that last marvellous polishing, filing and chiselling upon the dexterously fashioned material of his own creation. These documents, which Ibsen called "fore-works", are given to the world with his authorization; he looked upon them much as a great painter regards the original sketches and preparatory designs for his completed pictures. And it is noteworthy that, more than once during the latter years of his life, Ibsen, pointing to this packet of manuscripts, remarked to his wife and son: "These are very important things—perhaps the most important of all." Ferdinand Brunetière has applied the complex machinery of Darwinian evolution to literary forms, and shown the successive stages by which a

literary type reached its present state of development. In his "foreworks", Ibsen exhibits the successive stages in the evolution of a particular specimen of art-form, the modern drama, the most difficult, most recalcitrant of the forms of creative composition. Here we may observe, as it were, the Darwinian process modified by the mutation theory of De Vries—the gradual evolutionary process of infinitely small changes modified by the "evolution by explosion" of the human, experiential factor. A marvellous composite of the dual, mutually interacting operations of the analytic faculty with the synthetic genius, of the scientific method with the poetic vision.

### III

Upon Ibsen's table, it has been related, there stood beside his inkstand a small tray, containing a lot of extraordinary toys—some little carved wooden Swiss bears, a diminutive black devil, small cats, dogs and rabbits made of copper, one of which was playing the violin. "I never write a single line of any of my dramas unless that tray and its occupants are before me on the table", Ibsen is said to have remarked. "I could not write without them. It may seem strange—perhaps it is—but I cannot write without them." And with a quiet laugh, he mys-

teriously added, "Why I use them is my own secret." There is one other remark of Ibsen's which, taken in connection with this perhaps fanciful story, serves to give the clue to Ibsen's real attitude towards his work and the methods he employed. "Everything that I have written", he said in a letter to Ludwig Passarge in 1880, "has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience; in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification—for a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs. Hence I wrote the following dedicatory lines in a copy of one of my books:

"To *live*—is to war with fiends  
That infest the brain and the heart;  
To *write*—is to summon one's self,  
And play the judge's part."

Ibsen succeeded in packing his plays with the utmost of thought content, in that he deliberately made it a rule never to speak polemically save through the medium of his dramatic characters. Contrary to the popular impression that the successful dramatist must write always with "his eye on the stage", Ibsen seldom visited the stage save when his presence was imperatively required at the rehearsals of one of his own plays. And yet he was peculiarly sensitive

to scenic effects, such as the color of carpet and wall-paper, to proper intonation, and even to such an apparently insignificant detail as the size of an actress's hands. Brandes relates a significant incident which took place at a dinner given to Ibsen. One of the banqueters, who had escorted the beautiful actress, Fräulein Constance Brunn, arose at the banquet and said, "My partner requests me to present to you, Dr. Ibsen, the thanks of the actresses of the Christiania Theatre and to tell you that there are no rôles which she would rather play, or from which she can learn more, than yours." To which Ibsen immediately replied, "I must state at the outset that I do not write rôles, but represent human beings; and that never in my life during the creation of a play have I had before my eyes an actor or actress." It was Ibsen's remarkable power of visualizing the stage sets which enabled him to dispense with the actual theatre and the actual player. "Since I have a strong imaginative feeling for the dramatic", he once wrote, "I can see before me most vividly everything that is really credible, trustworthy, true." Like the great French magician, Houdin, Ibsen possessed a faculty for minute observation trained to a supreme degree. His genius for detail confirms his significant statement to Paulsen: "To dramatize is to *see*."

## IV

Before Ibsen wrote a single line bearing upon a play, he gave himself over to isolated contemplation and reflection. In long solitary walks, in the sanctuary of his study, in hours-long motionless contemplation of the sea or of the landscape, in minute reading of the newspapers down to the smallest advertisement, in dumb contemplation of the human pageant in the mirror before him as he sat at meals in his restaurant—Ibsen slowly and patiently allowed the ferment of ideas to go on in his brain until, as by a chemical reaction, there occurred the intellectual precipitation of some generality of moral import and sociologic bearing. He never put pen to paper, as he once confessed to Alfred Sinding-Larsen, until he had a clear picture of everything in his head—even down to the versification and rough details of the dialogue. When he actually began to write, he exhibited the marvellous spectacle of proceeding as uninterruptedly as if he were writing to dictation. The act of dressing was a long and laborious process with Ibsen; according to his own confessions, he was revolving in his mind, while dressing himself, the incidents and scenes of the play then in progress. It piques the fancy to wonder if the “auction” of *The*



*Lady From the Sea*, Solness' ascent to the tower, or Nora's argument with Helmer occurred to Ibsen while he was pulling on his trousers! When he left off work for the day, he took pains to keep in mind some fragment of dialogue for a starting point on the morrow. If, however, this bit of dialogue did not set his thoughts flowing readily through his pen, he abandoned writing for the time being, and quietly brooded over the problem, the characters, or the situation.

First of all, Ibsen jotted down memoranda (*Auszeichnungen*), by which he clarified the intellectual problem and set the drama in embryo, as under a microscope, before his eyes. These memoranda are usually of a philosophical, psychological or sociological nature: pungent observations upon life, criticisms of contemporary society, epigrams, thumb-nail sketches of character, *je ne sais quoi du tout*. They were written upon the most haphazard material—odd slips of paper, the backs of envelopes, newspaper wrappers, any loose sheets of paper. These noted ideas gradually seemed to group themselves, as if with subconscious design, around some generality of thought—a nuclear accretion around some central point.

After a time, the principal characters of his projected play, minutely observed from life but always transmuted in his poetic consciousness, began to assume definite psychological character and highly in-

dividual attributes. Then Ibsen seems to have brought this experiential conception to bear upon the epigrammatic idea-forms preserved in haphazard memoranda. This intrusion of his dramatic conception into the field of his general ideas produced a remarkable effect—much like that caused by a magnet brought to bear upon metal filings scattered upon a glass plate. At once the general ideas began to group themselves into symmetrical designs of definite contour.

These notes are preserved to us in various states of nuclear accretion; and examples may best exhibit the types of these various states. The following epigrams point directly to the plays bracketed after them.

Modern society is no human society; it is solely a society for males.—(*A Doll's House*.)

"Free-born men" is a mere flowery phrase. There aren't any. Marriage, the relation between man and woman, has destroyed the race, has fixed upon every one the marks of slavery.—(*Ghosts*.)

This tomfoolery! We acknowledge the right of the majority; and yet those who exercise the ballot constitute a small, arbitrarily limited minority.—(*An Enemy of the People*.)

Freedom consists in securing for the individual the right to free himself—every one according to his needs.—(*The Lady From the Sea*.)

People say that suicide is immoral. But what about living a life of prolonged suicide—out of regard for one's environment?—(*Hedda Gabler*.)

A new nobility will come into being. It will not be the nobility of birth or of wealth, nor yet the nobility of endowment or of knowledge. The nobility of the future will be the nobility of soul and of will.—(*Rosmersholm*.)\*

Those among us who have the vote are in the minority. Is the minority right?—(*An Enemy of the People*.)

At a slightly later stage in the evolution of his dramatic conception, Ibsen's ideas, as caught in consecutive memoranda, began to converge towards some general fable of human experience. The best example of this stage is the collection of the first memoranda for *Ghosts*; and to show the unsystematic way in which these ideas first found expression, it may be pointed out that some are found upon the back of an envelope addressed to "Madame Ibsen, 75 via Capo la Case, Citta (Rome)", others upon the back of a newspaper addressed to "Herr Dr. Ibsen, Swedish Consulate at Rome", date 1881.

The piece will be like an image of life. Faith undermined. But it does not do to say so. "The Asylum"—for the sake of others. They shall be

\* Ibsen used almost these identical words in a speech to the workingmen of Trondhjem, June 14, 1885.

happy—but this also is only an appearance—it is all ghosts—

One main point. She has been believing and romantic—this is not wholly obliterated by the standpoint afterward attained—"It is all ghosts."

It brings a Nemesis on the offspring to marry for external reasons, even if they be religious or moral.

She, the illegitimate child, may be saved by being married to—the son—but then—?

He was in his youth dissipated and worn out; then she, the religiously awakened, appeared; she saved him; she was rich. He had wanted to marry a girl who was thought unworthy. He had a son in his marriage; then he returned to the girl: a daughter—

These women of to-day, ill-treated as daughters, as sisters, as wives, not educated according to their gifts, withheld from their vocation, deprived of their heritage, embittered in mind—these it is who furnish the mothers of the new generation. What will be the consequence?

The fundamental note shall be: the richly flourishing spiritual life among us in literature, art, etc.—and then as a contrast: all humanity astray on wrong paths.

The complete human being is no longer a natural product, but a product of art, as corn is, and fruit trees, and the creole race, and the higher breeds of horses and dogs, the vine, etc.

The fault lies in the fact that all humanity has

miscarried. When man demands to live and develop humanly, it is megalomania. All humanity, and most of all the Christians, suffer from megalomania.

Among us we place monuments over the dead, for we recognize duties toward them; we allow people only fit for the hospital (literally lepers) to marry; but their offspring—? the unborn—?

A more finished state of memorandum, immediately precedent to the actual elaboration of the definite scenario, is preserved in reference to the play of *A Doll's House*. It is important to observe—and this with absolute certainty—, that undoubtedly at *one* stage in the development of the material, the drama developed from quite general ideas. Ibsen himself confessed to M. G. Conrad that he always used the individual as his *point saillant*; and he probably never worked his general ideas into a play solely for their own sake. Ibsen always insisted that he was much more the creative artist than the philosopher that the public seemed bent upon finding in him. And his plays must be thought of, not as thesis-plays merely embodying one germ-idea, but as artistic re-creations of human experience. With these reflections in mind may now be cited Ibsen's "Notes for the Tragedy of To-Day", the preliminary memorandum for *A Doll's House*, bearing the inscription "Rome, 10-19-'78."

There are two kinds of spiritual laws, two kinds of conscience, one in men and a quite different one in women. They do not understand each other; but the woman is judged in practical life according to the man's law, as if she were not a woman, but a man.

The wife in the play finds herself at last entirely at sea as to what is right and what wrong; natural feeling on one side and belief in authority on the other leave her in utter bewilderment.

A woman cannot be herself in the society of to-day, which is exclusively a masculine society, with laws written by men, and with accusers and judges who judge feminine conduct from the masculine standpoint.

She has committed forgery, and it is her pride; for she did it for love of her husband, and to save his life. But this husband, full of everyday rectitude, stands on the basis of the law, and regards the matter with a masculine eye.

Soul-struggles. Oppressed and bewildered by the belief in authority, she loses her faith in her own moral right and ability to bring up her children. Bitterness. A mother in the society of to-day, like certain insects (ought to) go away and die when she has done her duty toward the continuance of the species. Love of life, of home, of husband and children and kin. Now and then a woman-like shaking-off of cares. Then a sudden return of apprehension and dread. She must bear it all alone. The catastrophe approaches, inexorably, inevitably. Despair, struggle and disaster.

After the general outlines of the play had taken on finished shape, as revealed in the above memorandum for *A Doll's House*, for example, Ibsen next proceeded to the elaboration of the scenario. Ibsen worked from the scenario forward, in a manner highly scientific; this was always his practice, even the manuscript of the original version of Ibsen's first play, *Catiline*, of date "25-2-'49," exhibiting an elaborate scenario. Indeed, Ibsen had no respect for any dramatist who proceeded otherwise. Once besought by a young dramatist to read the manuscript of his new play, Ibsen curtly asked for the scenario. When the young man proudly replied that he needed no scenario, having followed his inspiration whithersoever it led him from scene to scene, Ibsen grew furious and showed the pseudo-dramatist the door, declaring that any one who dispensed with a scenario didn't know what a drama was and couldn't possibly write one. And yet, after all, the scenario as first outlined by Ibsen may best be regarded as an experimental foreshadowing, subject to radical modification as the writing of the play itself proceeds. It serves as the skeleton framework for Ibsen's subsequent ideation. Not infrequently a whole act—as in the case of *Peer Gynt*—is written before Ibsen has definitely decided just what rôle some leading character is destined to play. The fragments of *A Doll's House* indicate clearly that Ibsen discarded the original plan for

each act, when he came to the actual writing of it. While it is true, then, that the material took shape in his mind long before he wrote a word of actual dialogue, yet Ibsen expressly acknowledged that it never took such unalterable shape in his mind as to permit him to write the last act first and the first act last. During the course of the work, the details emerged by degrees.

In this respect, the creation of the drama, as exemplified by Ibsen, exhibits an excellent contrast to the creation of the Short-story, as exemplified by Maupassant or Poe. In the Short-story, the lines of action initially converge to the final goal. As Stevenson put it, the end is bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of the beginning. The conception must be retained throughout. In the drama, the lines of interest are continually set anew to converge, now here, now there. The totality of effect, the *Stimmung*, with Ibsen is created after the "story" is mapped out in skeleton dialogue. Ibsen at will broke through his original plan in the gradual development of a play. *The Lady From the Sea* in its original outline, with its wealth of characters, its unique rôles for Arnholm and the "Strange Passenger", and its situation in a much smaller place than in the completed play, exhibits the digressions from his original scenario Ibsen at times made in the final form. In many instances there is less a digression than an actual fusion or re-casting of adjacent



parts under the fire of his creative imagination. Both *The Pillars of Society* and *Rosmersholm*, for example, are four-act plays, though originally planned, and in part written, to have five acts.\* Ibsen possessed a remarkable faculty for rejecting the superfluous; he welds together allied yet technically dissociate elements, and by the formation of a concrete whole, projects us into the midst of the catastrophe itself.

Parts of the scenario of *The Lady From the Sea* in a most striking way exhibit at once the riotous play of Ibsen's fancies, and the initial fantastic form of his conception. Originally the scene of the play is a small watering place, shut in by steep, high, overshadowing cliffs, and the play begins at the time of the last voyage of the year. Slowly, the ships pass at midnight, noiselessly slipping into the bay and then out again.

The life is clearly gay, buoyant and fine up there in the shadow of the mountains and in the monotony of seclusion. There thoughts are thrown away: this sort of life is a shadow-life. No active power; no struggle for freedom. Only longing and wishes. Thus passes away the brief, bright summer. And after—into the gloom. Then awakes the longing for the great world without. But what is to be gained by it? With the situation, with the spiritual development arise claims and longings and wishes.

\* In *Rosmersholm*, the first two acts are fused together into one.

He or she, who stands upon the heights, desires the secrets of the future and share in the life of the future and association with the distant world. Limitation everywhere. Hence dejection like a mute song over the whole of human existence and human action. A bright summer day, with the great darkness behind—that is the sum total.

Is there some gap in man's evolution: Why must we belong to the dry land: Why not to the air? Why not to the sea? The longing to have wings. The strange dreams that one can fly without wondering over it,—what is the meaning of all this?

We shall gain control over the sea. Launch floating cities. Tow them northwards or southwards according to the season. Learn to control storms and weather. Something happy will come of it. And *we*—we shall not be there to see it!

The seductive power of the sea. The longing for the sea. People who are akin to the sea. Bound to the sea. Dependent on the sea. Must get back to the sea. One species of fish forms the primordial link in the evolutionary chain.\* Do rudiments of it still lurk in man's nature? In the nature of particular individuals?

The fantasies of the unresting, churning life of the sea, and of that which "is lost forever." The sea exercises upon you the power of a mood, which works like a will. The sea can hypnotize. Above all, Nature can. The great mystery is man's dependence upon the "will-less."

\*The species of fish, *Amphioxus lanceolatus*, is here doubtless referred to, indicating that Ibsen had given some study to the scientific treatment of the subject, probably in Darwin's *Descent of Man*.

## V

With the infinite patience of the coral, building row upon row with indefatigable industry, Ibsen slowly worked out the psychological features of his dramatic characters, first broadly sketched in the scenario. His power of imaginative incarnation was that of a magician indeed; and he never wrote about his characters until, as he himself phrased it, he had them wholly in his power and knew them down to the "last folds of their souls." The preliminary drafts, as a rule, lack dramatic emphasis or finality; and there is a certain stage in the incubation of a play, as Ibsen confessed to Mr. William Archer, when it might as easily turn into an essay as into a drama. Ibsen declared that the ability to project experiences *mentally lived through* was the secret of the literature of modern times. He looked around him and found models in abundance in actual life. He searched out the depths of his own soul and found there the confirmation of his hopes and dreams of future society. Starting from some crucial instance of contemporary human experience, Ibsen envisages for his creative fancy certain clearly marked, highly individual natures. Not the thesis, but the individual soul, is the prime subject of his

ceaseless preoccupation. It was a source of genuine pride to him that he possessed a genius for utilizing his acquaintances as models for his dramatic figures, —a way of “getting hold of people”, as he expressed it, for his plays. It is by no means improbable that Ibsen personified the little toys which stood upon his table. These were, perhaps, the *dramatis personæ*; he perhaps endowed each one of them with a name, conversed with them in the solitude of his study, and gave them their positions, their entrances and exits, in the play then preparing. The people of his fancy with whom he sometimes lived in solitude for decades before their final incarnation and inclusion in a play, were often more real to him than actual human beings; and he knew the characters almost from birth, in ancestral hereditament, in the features of their environment, in nascent qualities of soul. When some one remarked to Ibsen that Nora, in *A Doll's House*, had an odd name, Ibsen immediately replied: “Oh! her full name was Leonora; but that was shortened to Nora when she was quite a little girl. Of course, you know she was terribly spoilt by her parents.” Sometimes he fumbles here and there with his figures, developing some trait, heightening some characteristic. Again, he broods over a figure for years before finally incorporating it in a play. Yet again, he finds the secret at once and knows his characters from the very beginning. Perhaps there is no better

illustration of this than the description of the two leading figures in the first form of *Rosmersholm*.

She is an *intrigante* and she loves him. She wishes to be his wife and tenaciously pursues this aim. He suspects it, and she freely acknowledges it. Now for him there is no longer any happiness in life. Sorrow and bitterness awake the dæmonic in him. He wishes to die, and she shall die with him. She does.

Here we have the situation outlined in the most laconic form. The genius of the ultimate creation is displayed in the utilization of the immitigable influence of ancestral traits, the invention of the means—the driving to death of Mrs. Rosmer by Rebekka—through which Rosmer's self-confidence is shattered, his happiness destroyed, together with the final breaking down of individualistic youth, tainted with blood-guiltiness, under the pressure of ideals of life which lose themselves in the mists of ancient heredity. In the case of virtually all his prose plays, Ibsen was in the habit of tabulating a complete cast of characters before proceeding to any noteworthy development of the theme. And in some striking cases—notably in *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady From the Sea*, and *When We Dead Awaken*—he has noted the most important spiritual traits of the characters, and outlined in marvellous brevity of compression the inner meaning of their tragedy.

This is well illustrated in Rosmersholm as we have observed; but perhaps most strikingly in the preparatory notes for *When We Dead Awaken*.

First renowned through Irene. Then he wishes to live and enjoy a second youth with another. Then he changes the statue into a group. Irene becomes an auxiliary figure in the work, which has made him world-renowned—

First a single statue, then a group. Thereupon she left him.

Our life was not the life of two human beings.

What, then, was it?

Only the life of the artist and his model.

\* \* \* \* \*

When we dead awaken.

Yes, what see you there?

We see, that we have never lived.

We observe, again and again, Ibsen's stereoscopic imagination functioning brilliantly in the shaping and evolutionary formation of character. With all the art of a finished worker in mosaic, Ibsen bit by bit deepens the psychology, discovers hidden traits and qualities, gives form and motive to his dramatic figures. The first drafts show the characters moving about with less volitional activity than they display in the completed play, much as a person acting under mesmeric control differs from the normally active individual.

Once Ibsen had grasped the individual in full significance, knew her or him as he might know his own flesh and blood, the rest came easily, almost mechanically. The inscenation, the dramatic *ensemble*, gradually took shape—"composed", to use the artist's term—as if of its own volition. It is this which makes the dramas of Ibsen so supremely great: the characters are not the creatures of the situation, as in Scribe and Sardou, but the situation—the plot—is the inevitable consequence of the characters. This it is, which gives to the plays of Ibsen, as Bernard Shaw has acutely put it, the quality of "illumination of life"—imparting final verisimilitude to the discussions of conduct, unveiling of motives, conflicts of characters, laying bare of souls. Here comes into full play what Rossetti termed "fundamental brain-work": the working up of material in situation, in characterization and psychology. In the final forms, Ibsen eliminates the superfluous accessory figures, lops away auxiliary motives, heightens the dramatic effect of the situations, and rejects to the utmost extent all that is coincidental and adventitious in the mechanism.

## VI

A study of the prose plays brings to light the interesting fact that, in general, the complete mean-

ing of a play was never definitely fixed in Ibsen's mind until the ultimate draft, in spotless purity and perfection of chirography was finished. In certain cases the original title which Ibsen employed was not the title he finally adopted: *Svanhild* for *The Comedy of Love*, *White Horses* for *Rosmersholm*, and *Resurrection Day* for *When We Dead Awaken*.\* Ibsen once remarked to M. V. Conrad in connection with *The Lady From the Sea*,—and it seems to have been true in general,—that he did not know what the title was going to be, as he had one more act still to write. "I find my title at the end", he said. It is much the same with names of his characters, which change with such rapidity in the rough drafts or fragments that one is continually brought up wondering at some new character, who yet seems so familiar. To cite a random illustration in *Rosmersholm*, Kroll first appears as Hekman, then as Gylling; Ulrik Brendel next takes the name of Hekman, borrows from Rosmer the name of Rosenhjelm, appears next as Sejerhjelm, and again as Hetman; Rosmer assumes in succession the names of Boldt-Römer—a union of two old Norwegian noble names; Rosenhjelm; from Römer and Rosenhjelm in conjunction comes Rosmer—first with the surname Eilert Alfred (reminiscent of *Hedda Gabler* and *Little Eyolf*, forework), then with that

\* Ibsen abandoned the title of *White Horses* in favor of *Rosmersholm*, probably because, a short time before, he had employed a symbolic title for *The Wild Duck*.



of Johannes. In the first act the adventuress appears as Frau Rosmer, next changes to Fräulein Radeck, then Badeck; again appears as Frau Agatha Rosmer, next as Frau Rebekka, then as Fräulein Dankert, and in the third act finally as Fräulein Rebekka West. This matter of names may seem trivial; but it should be recalled that Ibsen expressed the conviction that there was a sort of hidden relation between name and character. And who has not remarked the appropriateness of *Stockmann* for the obstinate, stiff-necked doctor in *An Enemy of the People*, of *Rummel* for the noisy boaster in *The League of Youth*, of *Maja* for the blithe impersonation of the spring month in *When We Dead Awaken*? Ibsen left unstudied no detail which might contribute to the mood, the form, or the carrying power of his plays.

## VII

The original fragments of dialogue, as they first occurred to Ibsen, seem not to have been preserved. But the fragments that are preserved show these bits of dialogue thrown together in the form of acts, scenes, or even portions of scenes. The fused portions of *The League of Youth*, *A Doll's House*, *The Lady From the Sea*, *Little Eyolf* and *When We Dead Awaken* are, almost certainly, first forms

of this nature; probably this is also true of *Rosmersholm*, *The Master-Builder* and *John Gabriel Borkman*. After he had begun the development of a drama, Ibsen usually employed one or the other of two methods. One method was to take up each act singly, as soon as it was ready, work it over and write it out in final form before proceeding to the next act. The other method was to go straight through with his composition, and then go back and revise it. The mornings he was in the habit of devoting to the working-up of his dramatic material, the afternoons to the making of a "fair copy" of the completed portions. Ibsen certainly employed the first method in *The League of Youth*—the traces of which may readily be discerned in the unevenness of the dialogue of the finished play. He actually made a fair copy of the first act of *The Pillars of Society* after the original working up of the whole play—with the disappointing result that he had to discard all his already worked-up material. In consequence of this disastrous experience, he ever afterwards seems to have employed the plan of completely finishing a play before proceeding to the final drafting.

## VIII

The transcendent genius of Ibsen is revealed, not primarily in the sureness of instinct with which he

rejected the superfluous, the marvellous taste revealed in the deletion of the obvious or the questionable, the lopping off of the auxiliary characters which diffuse rather than concentrate the action. Nor can it be said that Ibsen's technique, with all its finish and classic restraint, is his most remarkable quality as a dramatist. His plays, as Henry James phrased it, are "infinitely *noted*", revealing the ultimate refinement of the critical and creative temperaments in fortunate conjunction. His observation was unerring; and his power of visualizing the scene was so perfected that he never felt the necessity to enter the theatre or to study the drama in its natural environment. These qualities, alone and in themselves, were sufficient to make of Ibsen perhaps the most deft technician, all things considered, that any age has known. Ibsen knew quite enough science for his purpose; and his grasp of the fundamental weakness of modern life gives to his plays the character of sociological documents. But the quality which gives permanence and enduring validity to Ibsen as a dramatist is the quality of psychological intuition. His power of penetrating into the brains and hearts of men, searching out their secrets, and projecting authentically veracious and human representations of human character far transcends all his other powers.

Nowhere does Ibsen's art as a dramatist more signally reveal itself than in the comparison of the

preliminary studies for his modern social dramas with the completed plays themselves. Here we are enabled to espy the great dramatist like a spider in his den, spinning out the fine-drawn threads of the complicated web of dramatic conjuncture and spiritual crisis. The final forms, as compared with the "foreworks", display immense economy of material, compression of thought, and complication of motive. A situation which, in some rough draft, appears somewhat commonplace, begins gradually to take on lively significance. The atmosphere becomes surcharged with suppressed emotion; the characters thrill with tense excitement; and there are lapses and pauses full of implication to replace the diffuse explication of the original dialogue. The rough draft lacks color and atmosphere; the final form is a dramatized mood to which the human symphonic orchestra is delicately attuned.

An admirable example is furnished in the case of *A Doll's House*. It is noteworthy that Ibsen is here primarily concerned with the woman question; and his first inclination was to exhibit this clearly, at the same time showing Nora's ignorance of and indifference to this question as a burning social problem. In the final version, the following interesting bit of dialogue in the preliminary draft has been deleted—doubtless because it called attention too obviously, too extraneously, shall we say, to the play's thesis.

Nora: When an unhappy wife is separated from her husband she is not allowed to keep her children? Is that really so?

Mrs. Linden: Yes, I think so. That's to say, if she's guilty.

Nora: Oh, guilty, guilty; what does it mean to be guilty? Has a wife no right to love her husband?

Mrs. Linden: Yes, precisely, her husband—and him only.

Nora: Why, of course; who was thinking of anything else? But that law is unjust, Kristina. You can see clearly that it is the men that have made it.

Mrs. Linden: Aha!—so you have begun to take up the woman question?

Nora: No, I don't care *a bit* about it.

In *The League of Youth*, and even in *The Pillars of Society*, with their omnipresent intrigue, their occasional intervention of the long arm of coincidence, their elaborate auxiliary plots, Ibsen has not yet succeeded in freeing himself from the influence of the artificial methods of Scribe and the French school of drama. So, in the preliminary draft for *A Doll's House*, Dr. Rank, under the name of Hank, appears as a perfectly needless character, mechanically filling in the gaps and having no organic relation to the plot. He is the classical confidant *manqué*, a futile *raisonneur* of the most artificial kind. At the time he was writing *A Doll's House*, it seems that Ibsen was full of the ideas of Darwin, whose works he probably had recently read

—the *Origin of Species* (1872) and the *Descent of Man* (1875) having both been translated by the Danish author, Jens Peter Jacobsen. So Ibsen employs Dr. Hank solely as the mouthpiece for the Darwinian ideas of evolution—as exhibited in the following two passages, both of which are deleted in the final version.

Hank: Hallo! what's this? A new carpet? I congratulate you! Now take, for example, a handsome carpet like this—is it a luxury? I say it isn't. Such a carpet is a paying investment; with it under foot, one has higher, subtler thoughts, and finer feelings, than when one moves over cold, creaking planks in a comfortless room. Especially where there are children in the house. The race ennobles itself in a beautiful environment.

Nora: Oh, how often I have felt the same, but could never express it!

Hank: No, I daresay not. It is an observation in spiritual statistics—a science as yet very little cultivated.

\* \* \* \* \*

If Krogstad's home had been, so to speak, on the sunny side of life, with all the spiritual windows opening toward the light—I daresay he might have been a decent enough fellow, like the rest of us.

Mrs. Linden: You mean that he is not—?

Hank: He cannot be. His marriage was not of the kind to make it possible. An unhappy marriage, Mrs. Linden, is like small-pox: It scars the soul.

Nora: And what does a happy marriage do?

Hank: It is like a "cure" at the baths; it expels all peccant humors, and makes all that is good and fine in a man grow and flourish.

It is a mark of Ibsen's skill that he invents Dr. Rank's malady—like Krogstad's moral downfall—as an illustration of his favorite theme in future drama, Responsibility. Thereby Nora's eyes are gradually opened to the significance of her responsibility to her children, and so, through this transformation Dr. Rank, as family physician and personal friend, takes on a unique relation to the development of Nora's conscience.

Many empty sayings, many superfluous motives in the earlier draft are transposed in the final form into terms of spiritual development and character exposure. In the first draft, after Helmer has read Krogstad's letter returning the forged note, he cries, "You are saved, Nora, you are saved"; in the final form, with what singular clarity is Helmer's irredeemable selfishness caught in the changed phrase, "*I am saved, Nora, I am saved!*" In the preliminary draft, there is no trace of the oft-quoted question and answer with which, as by a lightning flash, Ibsen reveals the abyss which has suddenly yawned between Nora and Helmer:

Helmer: I would gladly work for you night and day, Nora—bear sorrow and want for your sake. No man sacrifices his honor, even for one he loves.

Nora: Millions of women have done so.

Nora's inordinate fondness for macaroons, so indicative of her childish nature, is an afterthought; and there is but the barest indication of her tendency to fibbing, so admirably accentuated in the final form as an instance of the transmission of hereditary characteristics. In the final form, the incident of the tarantella is naturally introduced—whereas, in the preliminary draft, it appears to be lugged in as a mere concession to the popular taste for theatricality; and natural causes are finally assigned for Nora's success in deceiving Helmer about her furtive copying. Further instances are unnecessary for demonstrating Ibsen's perfection of craftsmanship in his transmutation and re-adaptation of the apparently trivial, yet character-revealing incidents in the play.

## IX

*A Doll's House*, in the course of its development, exhibits admirably the various mental stages through which Ibsen passed in the creation of a drama. We note how Ibsen makes experiments and acknowledges failure; goes into blind alleys and is forced to retrace his steps; gradually develops and complicates the motives of his characters; and ultimately exhibits the situation as the inevitable outcome of the psychology. A study of the foreworks



reveals salient examples on every hand. In *The Pillars of Society* Ibsen exhibits his power of condensation, in dropping the figures of Mads Tønnesen, Johan's father, Consul Bernick's blind mother, and Dina Dorf's mother; and his economy of technique is portrayed in having Johan Tønnesen and Lona Hessel go to America together and return together, rather than act in the haphazard ways of the first draft. From a dull, simple child in the forework, Hedwig in *The Wild Duck* is transformed, as if by a magician's wand, into a sweet, loving, infinitely tender daughter; and the real poignancy of her tragedy is unforgettably fixed in the imagination by the introduction of the presaged darkness of her coming blindness. By this simple expedient, Ibsen vastly deepens the tragedy; and the suspicious connection of Hedwig's threatened blindness with the failing eyesight of the old Werle tightens the cords of suspicion already tense to bursting in Hjalmar's breast. In the cast of characters, in the foreworks to *Rosmersholm*, Rebekka is depicted merely as "somewhat unscrupulous, but in a refined way"; and in the preliminary memorandum, it is stated that, in Rebekka's pursuit of Rosmer, there is cause for misery and unhappiness. In the finished play, these two concepts are brought into psychological harmony, by making Rebekka the evil genius who, in her passion for Rosmer, does not scruple, by diabolic and repeated insinuations, to

drive the weakminded, sick-souled Beata into the millrace. In the first draft of *Little Eyolf*, Miss Varg, the old "were-wolf", is Johanna's (Rita's) aunt; and she possesses little of the symbolic meaning and hypnotic power of the finished figure. The subtlety with which Ibsen has made of the "rat-wife" a figure of lasting mystery and horror, an impersonation of Death itself, is an irresistible reminder of the weird magic of the author of *The Marble Faun*. The "secrets of the alcove" revealed in the completed play furnish the real cause and motive for the mutual estrangement of Eyolf's father and mother; and the memorable phrase, "There stood your champagne—and you tasted it not," was a brilliant, strong afterthought. The preliminary draft of *Hedda Gabler* is conspicuous for the absence of that magic phrase, "vine leaves in his hair", with which the erotic Hedda always conjures up a Bacchanalian image of the dæmonic Lövborg. And that potent formula, "Liberty with Responsibility", the one clue to the destruction of Ellida's obsession (though even in the finished play it gives a schematic note to the *dénouement*) is found nowhere in the forework to *The Lady From the Sea*. In many of the finished plays are memorable phrases and situations which fix the fancy and knit the action and the characters closer together; while from the preliminary drafts are gone numerous details which too strongly accentuate the thesis or are in themselves,

though intrinsically interesting, dramatically extraneous.

Ibsen's efforts at the emancipation of modern society inevitably took the form of life-struggles. It is to the enduring profit of the stage that these life-struggles always presented themselves to Ibsen as dramas. And everywhere, in the study of his posthumous works, we gain the impression of a mighty intensity at work, creating, re-creating. Everywhere refinement, everywhere complication of motive, everywhere increase in psychological depth and richness. Superficial incidents of the exterior life are sublimated into vitally revealing incidents of the inner life. Ibsen now stands forth in a new light as a dramatist. Every play appears as a marvellous result of artistic compression and selection. Every play is individual and distinctive; and yet all are linked together with invisible, hidden motives. All rest upon the indestructible foundation of permanent, enduring art.



*BERNARD SHAW*

*"It was easy for Ruskin to lay down the rule of dying rather than doing unjustly; but death is a plain thing: justice a very obscure thing. How is an ordinary man to draw the line between right and wrong otherwise than by accepting public opinion on the subject; and what more conclusive expression of sincere public opinion can there be than market demand? Even when we repudiate that and fall back on our private judgment, the matter gathers doubt instead of clearness. The popular notion of morality and piety is to simply beg all the most important questions in life for other people; but when those questions come home to ourselves, we suddenly discover that the devil's advocate has a stronger case than we thought: we remember that the way of righteousness or death was the way of the Inquisition; that hell is paved, not with bad intentions, but with good ones . . ."*

*Note on Modern Prizefighting*, appended to *Cashel Byron's Profession* (authorized edition), H. S. Stone & Co., Chicago, 1901.

## BERNARD SHAW

That modern Samuel Johnson, the late Benjamin Jowett, once spoke of Benjamin Disraeli as "a combination of the Arch-Priest of Humbug and a great man." Not otherwise has Bernard Shaw been freely characterized in this day and generation. The world-famed American showman, P. T. Barnum, built up a fortune upon the sweet and simple faith that the American people love to be "humbugged." In the minds of many, Bernard Shaw has become a world-author through the possession of a similar faith: that not America alone, but the whole world loves to be humbugged. "The public imagination demands a best man everywhere", Shaw once said; "and if Nature does not supply him the public invents him. The art of humbug is the art of getting invented in this way." According to the pontiffs of literature, a large part of Shaw's stock in trade consists in making himself "a motley to the view." Interrogated once as to the reason for his eccentric conduct, Charles Baudelaire complacently replied, "*Pour étonner les sots.*" Were Bernard Shaw chal-

lenged for the reasons for his eccentricity, he would doubtless reply, "To astonish the wise." In a very literal sense does he subscribe to the Shakspearean view: "All the world's a stage, and men and women only players." In this day of persistent self-puffery, Bernard Shaw has deliberately chosen to stand in the limelight, to occupy the focus of the stage of the world. "In England as elsewhere the spontaneous recognition of really original work begins with a mere handful of people", he once said, "and propagates itself so slowly that it has become a commonplace to say that genius, demanding bread, is given a stone after its possessor's death. The remedy for this is sedulous advertisement. Accordingly, I have advertised myself so well that I find myself, while still in middle life, almost as legendary a person as the Flying Dutchman."

## I

Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, much virtue still inheres in the statement that life has its realities behind its shows. Whoever would write the natural history of a literary phenomenon like Bernard Shaw must first disabuse his mind of the popular fantastic notions in regard to his life and personality. The legend of Saint Bernard fades



into thin air before the plain recital of the life of Mr. Shaw. The year 1856, which witnessed the demise of the "first man of his century", Heinrich Heine, likewise witnessed the birth of the "laughing Ibsen", Bernard Shaw, in Dublin, Ireland, on July 26th. Cursed with an impecunious father, he was early apprenticed to a land agent in Dublin to be taught the meaning of thrift. Blessed with a mother of rare talent for music, he unconsciously acquired a knowledge and appreciation of music which was to play no insignificant rôle in his later life. Revolted by the social pretensions and prejudices of his family, who "revolved impecuniously in a sort of vague second-cousinship round a baronetcy", he soon became animated with a Carlylean contempt for that type of snobbery denominated "respectability in its thousand gigs." He boasts of the fact that as a schoolboy he was incorrigibly idle and worthless, since the training of four schools he successively attended did him a great deal of harm and no good whatever. But it must not be supposed that his youthful years were barren in educative influence. Parrot-like, he would whistle the oratorios and operatic scores he heard repeatedly practised at home by the musical society of which his mother was a leading figure—much as the street-gamin of to-day whistles the latest piece of rag-time music. Before he was fifteen, according to his own confession, he knew at least one important work by Han-

del, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi and Gounod, from cover to cover. For hours at a time the lad of fifteen used to frequent the deserted halls of the National Gallery of Ireland; with his "spare change" he bought the volumes of the Bohn translations of Vasari, and learned to recognize the works of a considerable number of Italian and Flemish painters.

It was the mature conviction of his later years that all the people he knew as a boy in Ireland were the worse for what they called their religion. On hearing the American evangelists, Moody and Sankey, the young sixteen-year-old Shaw was driven to protest in *Public Opinion*—his first appearance in print—that if *this* were Religion, then he must be an Atheist. Indeed, as he said a few years ago, "If religion is that which binds men to one another, and irreligion that which sunders, then must I testify that I found the religion of my country in its musical genius and its irreligion in its churches and drawing-rooms."

Unlike his colleagues in criticism of later years, William Archer and Arthur Bingham Walkley, graduates of Edinburgh and Oxford respectively, Bernard Shaw despised, half ignorantly, half penetratingly, the thought of a university education, for it seemed to him to turn out men who all thought alike and were snobs.

He went into the land office, where he learned

how to collect rents and to write a good hand. But although he retained his place solely for the sake of financial independence, his heart and brain were a thousand miles away. Finally his work grew unbearably irksome to him, and in the year 1876 he deliberately walked out of the land office forever. Shortly afterwards, he joined his mother in London—the future theatre for the display of his unequal, if brilliant and versatile genius.

During the following nine years, from 1876 to 1885, Shaw turned his hand with only indifferent success to many undertakings. It was not simply a crime, it was a blunder to have been an Irishman—and consequently an alien to everything genuinely English. Shaw's unembarrassed frankness passed for outrageous prevarication, his cleverest jest for the most solemn earnest. Like Oscar Wilde, he learned the crippling disadvantage of being an Irishman of superior mentality, ever trifling in a world of ideas. Whatever he did met with failure; his lightest *bal-lons d'essai* were as unwelcome to the English public as were his heaviest efforts at blank verse, at criticism of music, at journalistic hack work. Through his acquaintance with Chichester Bell, of the family of that name, so celebrated for scientific invention and notable research, he became interested in physics and acquainted with the works of Tyndall and Helmholtz. He even worked for a time with a company formed in London to exploit an invention of the

great American inventor, Thomas A. Edison. After various attempts, of which this was the last, to assist his parents by endeavoring to earn an honest living for himself, he finally gave up trying, he confesses, to commit this sin against his nature. It is true that his life was not without its diversions; for his talent as a congenial accompanist on the piano assured his *entrée* into a certain desirable circle of musical society in London; and the great library at Bloomsbury and the priceless picture galleries at Trafalgar Square and Hampton Court, certainly, were not lacking in a hospitality of which he gladly availed himself.

During the five years from 1879 to 1884 inclusive, he devoted his energies ruthlessly to the production of five novels, one of them never published, which were to lead, if not to the immediate establishment of literary position, certainly to the formation of valuable friendships and acquaintances of lifelong standing. Again and again he sent forth his manuscripts; but they were invariably returned by the publishers. His iconoclasm, his freedom of thought and expression, his Ibsenic frankness in dealing with the gray, garish aspects of contemporary life, were in inverse ratio to the requirements of the conservative, unprogressive London publishers. Unwilling to sacrifice his art, resolved "to paint man man, whatever the issue", and determined not to disavow the principles at which he had arrived, he accepted

the alternative—the temporary failure of his novels.

To the Socialist revival of the 'eighties, the world owes the credit for the discovery of Bernard Shaw. In 1879, Shaw first met the late James Lecky, and acquired the grounding in Temperament, the fondness for Phonetics, and the early incentive to public speaking which have borne such abundant fruit in his later career. Through Lecky's influence, Shaw joined, and became a constant debater in, the Zeletical Society, a debating club modelled on the once famed Dialectical Society. Here Shaw first met Sidney Webb, that able Socialist economist, and soon became his close friend and co-worker. Shaw subsequently joined the Dialectical Society and remained faithful to it for a number of years. From this time on, he evinced the greatest interest in public speaking, and persistently haunted public meetings of all sorts. One night, in 1883, he wandered into the Memorial Hall in Farringdon street; by chance the speaker was the great Single-Taxer, Henry George. For the first time did the importance of the economic basis dawn upon Shaw's mind. He left the meeting a changed man; and soon was devouring George's *Progress and Poverty* and Marx's *Das Kapital* with all the ardor of youth and burning social enthusiasm. While Shaw refused to subscribe to all the economic theories of Marx, and later victoriously refuted him on the question of the Theory of Value, he realized the overwhelming validity of the "bible of the work-

ing classes" as a jeremiad against the *bourgeoisie*. During these days, he spoke early and often, at the street corner, on the curbstone, from the tail of a cart. He once said that he first caught the ear of the British public on a cart in Hyde Park, to the blaring of brass bands!

In practical conjunction with Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas and Sidney Olivier, although they actually joined at different times, Shaw became a member of the Fabian Society after it had been in existence only a short time. His connection with that society is a matter of history, and finds tangible evidence to-day, not only in books and pamphlets, but also in the actual Socialist and Labor representation in the London County Council and British parliament. Suffice it to say that, from the very first, his influence made itself most strongly felt upon the society, and for many years he has been the guiding spirit in its councils. Through the establishment of certain Socialist journals during the 'eighties, Shaw's novels began to find their way into print. *An Unsocial Socialist* and *Cashel Byron's Profession* appeared in *To-Day*, printed by Henry Hyde Champion, later by Belfort Bax and James Leigh Joynes, among others; *The Irrational Knot* and *Love Among the Artists* appeared in *Our Corner*, published by the brilliant orator and Socialist agitator, Mrs. Annie Besant. They made no impression upon the British public, but greatly pleased

such men as William Archer, William Morris, Robert Louis Stevenson, and William E. Henley, who gave either public or personal expressions of their appreciation. From time to time in the last fifteen years they have been published in both England and America, with varying, but in general, with unusual success in this day of infinitesimally short-lived successes.

From 1883 on, Shaw was daily coming in contact with the brilliant spirits of the younger generation in Socialism, and with the leaders in thought and opinion on the side of vegetarianism, humanitarianism and land nationalization. There were James Leigh Joynes, who had been arrested in Ireland with Henry George; Sidney Olivier, afterwards a distinguished author and now Governor of Jamaica; Henry Hyde Champion, the well-known Socialist; Henry Salt, an Eton master, married to Joynes' sister; and Edward Carpenter, the greatest living disciple of Walt Whitman. After joining the Fabian Society, Shaw's constant associates were Hubert Bland, Graham Wallas, Sidney Olivier, and Sidney Webb; and through his Socialist activities he became a friend of William Morris, who was never a Fabian, but who maintained an attitude of the broadest tolerance toward all the Socialist sects. In their early days the Fabians were as insurrectionary in principle as the other Socialist bodies in London; not until the election in 1885 did the line of cleavage

between the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation clearly appear. At this time, the Fabian Society openly denounced the conduct of the Council of the Social-Democratic Federation in accepting money from the Tory party in payment of the election expenses of Socialist candidates as calculated to disgrace the Socialist movement in England. In the following two years, the Fabian Society took little or no part in the organization of insurrectionary projects in London; and finally, after many debates with that section of the Socialist League known as Anti-Communist, headed by Joseph Lane and William Morris, definitely discountenanced Kropotkinism among its members. Indeed, they finally demolished Anarchism in the abstract, as Shaw said, "by grinding it between human nature and the theory of economic rent."

When Shaw first joined the Zeletical Society, he was the poorest of debaters; but he possessed the nerve to make a fool of himself. He practised platform oratory incessantly, haunted hole-and-corner debates of all sorts, and seized every opportunity to make himself proficient in the art of public exhibition of his views. He joined the Hampstead Historic Club, and there learned the theories of Marx through the necessity of elucidating them for his colleagues. He was one of a private circle of economists, which afterwards developed into the British



Economic Association; at these meetings the social question was ignored, and the discussions were conducted solely on an economic basis. In this way Shaw became thoroughly grounded in economic theory; and in this way also, he learned supremely well the art of public speaking. As a speaker, Shaw far excelled William Morris; lacking the genius for oratory of a Charles Bradlaugh or an Annie Besant, he yet combined the imperturbability of a Sidney Webb with the wit of an Oscar Wilde. Ever on the alert, he is keen, incisive, and facile as a public speaker; he has every faculty about him when he mounts the platform. He combines the devastating wit of the Irishman with the penetrating logic of the Frenchman. He gave hundreds of lectures and addresses, and frequently debated in public in London and the provinces, for many years; and always at his own expense—for the Cause. His speech is always a challenge. "Call me disagreeable, only call me something", he vigorously clamors; "for then I have roused you from your stupid torpor and made you think a new thought!"

In principle and in practice, Shaw is a strictly constitutional Socialist; he has no faith in revolutionary measures, save as the very last resort against direst tyranny. Inspired by Philip Wicksteed's attack on Marx's Theory of Value, Shaw devoted a great deal of time to the study of the economic

theories of the late Stanley Jevons; and with the aid of the Jevonian machinery exposed the fallacies in the Marxian Theory of Value.

Furthermore, he denied the existence of what is called the war of classes; he did everything possible to reduce Socialism to an intellectual rather than to an emotional basis, to envisage it as a product of economic factors rather than of insurrectionism. His position is admirably summed up in the following passage:

"The Fabian declares quite simply that there is no revolution, that there exists no war of classes, that the salaried workers are far more imbued with conventions and prejudices and more *bourgeois* than the middle class itself; that there is not a single legal power democratically constituted, without excepting the House of Commons, which would not be much more progressive were it not restrained by the fear of the popular vote; that Karl Marx is no more infallible than Aristotle or Bacon, Ricardo or Buckle, and that, like them, he has committed errors now obvious to the casual student of economics; that a declared Socialist is, morally, neither better nor worse than a liberal or a conservative, nor a workman than a capitalist; that the workman can change the actual governmental system if he so desires, while the capitalist cannot do so, because the workman would not permit him; that it is an absurd contradiction in terms to declare that the working

classes are starved, impoverished and kept in ignorance by a system which loads the capitalist with food, education, and refinements of all sorts, and at the same time to pretend that the capitalist is a scoundrel, harsh and sordid in spirit, while the workman is a highminded, enlightened and magnanimous philanthropist; that Socialism will eventuate in the gradual establishment of public rule and a public administration set into effective action by parliaments, assemblies and common councils; and that none of these rules will lead to revolution nor occupy more place in the political programme of the time than a law for the regulation of manufactures or the ballot would do now: in a word, that the part of the Socialist will be a definitely fixed political labor, to struggle not against the malevolent machinations of the capitalist, but against the stupidity, narrowness, in a word, the idiocy (in giving to the word its precise and original sense) of the class which actually suffers most from the existing system.”\*

Bernard Shaw resumed his literary labors rather late in the 'eighties, and has been diligent as a man of letters ever since. Indeed, his is an unusually checkered career, since he has, at one time or another, dipped into almost every phase of authorship. For a time, through the kind offices of Mr. William Archer, Shaw was enabled to write criticisms of

\**Les Illusions du Socialisme*, by Bernard Shaw; *L'Humanité Nouvelle*, August, 1900.

books and pictures in *The World*; and at times also he wrote for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Truth*. In 1888, Shaw joined the editorial staff of *The Star* on the second day of its existence; but his Socialist utterances so alarmed the editor, the brilliant wit, T. P. O'Connor, that Shaw was given a column to fill with comments on current music—a subject harmless from the political point of view at least. Here Shaw gave free vent to his eccentricity, and the paper fairly blazed with his jests and *hardiesses*, his follies and foibles, his quips and cranks. Dissembling his wide knowledge of music, especially modern music, by means of an air of irresponsible levity and outrageous flippancy, he gave no ground for suspicion of the existence in these delightful sallies of a solid substratum of genuine criticism. As “Corno di Bassetto”, he vied with his colleague, A. B. Walkley, the dramatic critic for *The Star*, in furnishing rare entertainment for the readers of that first of London half-penny papers.

When Louis Engel resigned his position as musical critic on the staff of *The World*, the post fittingly fell to Bernard Shaw, who for long had slowly been saturating himself in the best music from Mozart to Wagner, from London to Bayreuth. Until now, he had made no stir in the world of letters—few people knew who “C. di B.” really was. But as a successor of Louis Engel, he entered into his new duties with zeal and zest, and created a new standard for *The*

*World* by his brilliant and witty critiques. "Every man has an inalienable right to make a fool of himself", Victor Hugo once wrote; "but he should not abuse that right." Bernard Shaw stopped just short of abuse of his inalienable right. Like a street fakir, he announced the value of his wares with sublime audacity. He adopted the haughty tone of superiority of a Wilde or a Whistler, although he did it always not only in the wittiest but also in the most good-natured way imaginable. The oculist who once examined his eyes seems to have been the unwitting cause of first diverting the rewards of literature in his direction. The ophthalmic specialist declared that Shaw's vision was "normal", at the same time explaining that the vision of nine-tenths of the people in the world is abnormal. Shaw at once leaped to the conclusion that his intellectual as well as his physical vision was normal, while that of the "damned compact, liberal majority" was aberrant, myopic, astigmatic. Too conscientious to put on a pair of abnormal spectacles and aberr his vision to suit the taste of the astigmatic nine-tenths of the reading public, too poor to attempt transcripts of life in order to win the support of the one-tenth which, because of normal vision, was therefore as impecunious as himself, he turned critic and appeared before the British public as Punch. He had only to open his eyes and describe things exactly as they appeared to him, to become known as the most

humorously extravagant paradoxer in London. He succeeded in demonstrating once again the old, old proposition that truth is stranger than fiction.

After a while the exuberant "G. B. S.", as he signed himself in *The World*, set out in search of new fields to conquer. When Mr. Frank Harris—who possessed the virtues, as well as some of the faults, of Mr. Edmund Yates—revived *The Saturday Review*, Shaw was chosen as dramatic critic. He at once characteristically broke the sacred tradition of anonymity, till then—1895—inviolable in its columns. In earlier years, Shaw had often spoken to deaf ears; for his was the strange language of a Robertson, a Gilbert, a Wilde. In all that he wrote there was that contradictoriness between letter and spirit, so characteristic of the Celtic genius. Everything struck his mind at such an acute angle as to give forth prismatic refractions of dazzling and many-hued brilliancy. His first great period began as critic on *The World*, when he zealously lauded Wagner, daringly defied the academic school of British music, and gaily set himself up as the infallible critic of the musical world. And now as dramatic critic on *The Saturday Review*, he achieved in a few years the reputation of the most brilliant journalistic writer in England.

Like Taine, he realized the important truth that those things we agree to call abnormal, are in reality normal, and appear quite naturally in the

ordinary course of events. Accordingly, he devised a well-known formula for readable journalism: "Spare no labor to find out the right thing to say; and then say it with the most exasperating levity, as if it were the first thing that would come into any one's head." He expressed the belief that good journalism is much rarer and more important than good literature; and by his own rare and unique work he gave a practical proof of the truth of his conviction. He led a magnificent crusade in behalf of Ibsen and in defiance of Shakspeare. If, on the one hand, he praised Ibsen to the skies for the intellectual content of his plays, on the other hand he upbraided Shakspeare for his lamentable poverty in the matter of philosophy. If he saw in Ibsen a disheartened optimist disagreeably intent upon improving the world, he saw in Shakspeare a vulgar pessimist, with *vanitas vanitatum* eternally upon his lips. If Ibsen not infrequently jarred his sensibilities with the ultra-realism of his clinical demonstrations, Shakspeare gave him unfeigned pleasure by the music of his language—his "word-music" as it has been called—his delightful fancy, his large perception of the comic, and his incomparable art as a story-teller. When Shaw finished his dramatic career, he had the gratification of the knowledge that while Ibsen was not popular on the English stage, he was nevertheless recognized by the highest authorities as the greatest of living dramatists. And he

boasted on severing his connection with *The Saturday Review*, that whereas, when he began his work as a dramatic critic, Shakspeare was a divinity and a bore, now he was at least a fellow-creature!

At last, in 1898, he severed his connection with *The Saturday Review* and became a dramatist by profession. He had, by dogmatic assertion, iteration and reiteration of his merits as wit, raconteur and paradoxer, so he declares, actually succeeded in establishing his literary prestige for all time. He might dodder and dote, platitudinize and pot-boil; but, once convinced, the dull but honest British intelligence could not be shaken. He had become the jester at the court of King Demos—the confessor of the sovereign public. And that public rewarded him at last with eager appreciation of all his sallies and *bon mots*.

## II

I know no more curious subject than that of contemporaneous mythology. No courses in this subject are offered at the university of to-day; and yet the existence of contemporary myths is one of the oldest, as well as the newest, facts of all history.

Many a genius is not discovered until he is lost to the world; his personality and unrecorded utterances have often been far more vital and suggestive



than any book or printed document he may have left behind. What would we not give for a two-volume "intimate biography" of Shakspeare written by one of his contemporaries? To his own age, Shakspeare was the roisterer of the Mermaid Tavern, the popular *entrepreneur* of the Globe Theatre—the author for an age but not for all time; to our own, he is a being as coldly impersonal, as far removed from the warm actualities of daily life, as the once vital gods of high Olympus.

On the other hand, it is often the fate of a brilliant genius to be stamped, labelled, and catalogued during his life-time, to be denominated "a priest after the order of Melchizedek," when in reality he has no relation either to priesthood or to Melchizedek. Once the domino of the public's choosing has been donned, he ceases to be a human being and becomes a mere grinning mask.

Nothing is so true and at the same time so false as what may be called the G. B. S. legend. The most incredible yarn in contemporary mythology is the Shavian myth.

Picture to yourself, if you please, a tall, thin, alert-looking person; a face of excessive pallor contrasting clearly with hair and whiskers of a sandy red, heavily sprinkled, or rather edged, with gray; and a general air of nonchalant extemporaneousness. Given an olive skin and black eyes, hair and beard, Bernard Shaw might well pass for the hero

—off the stage—of romantic Italian opera. There is, too, another resemblance, puzzling for a moment, till of a sudden it flashes out. As portrayed in the photographs of Histed or Beresford—not in the color-plates of Steichen or Coburn—Bernard Shaw is often to be encountered upon the Rue Clichy or the Boulevard des Capucines. Look again, and you note the Germanic type—red beard and blue eyes—suggesting the Wagnerian comic opera, “Die Meistersinger.” And as you look again, and observe the pointed beard, the upward curling moustachios, and the peaked eyebrows turning sharply outward and upward, there comes a vision of a cadaverous Celtic Édouard de Reszke—a genial *Mephistopheles* of the cock feather, the living impersonation of a Max Beerbohm cartoon.

One is struck by Mr. Shaw’s intense pallor, the gleaming whiteness and delicate texture of his skin, and the clear steel-blue of his eyes. The frame for an artist’s sketch would be an elongated rectangle—a curious cephalic conformation illustrated in more than one of the Coburn prints. His brow—“the brow of a Madonna,” as one of his acquaintances described it—is fine and noble; but his eyes are his most significant and characteristic feature. When he is engaged in serious conversation, particularly in the effective enunciation of an idea, his eyes have all the commanding directness of the soldier;

but the greater part of the time they are dancing with the light of irrepressible humor.'

One idea, utterly mistaken, but fondly cherished by the many, is the supposition that Shaw's costume is excessively outré or bizarre. And yet it is quite true that his clothes, as well as his face and figure, serve to mark him out in any crowd. He wears, usually, brown woollens, a soft shirt with a rolled collar, a four-in-hand tie of inconspicuous color, brown shoes, and a brown Fedora hat with a very wide brim. He abhors and forswears the use of either starch or blacking as offensive and dirty.

"I infinitely prefer a soft, unstarched shirt of finest texture," he once told me, "to a white breast-plate plastered over with a nasty coating of tal-low."

Two word-pictures of his personal appearance, respectively at the beginning of his career and at the present time, clearly illustrate the remarkable change in his fortunes, one might even say in his views, that has taken place in the last quarter of a century.

"When I first knew Bernard Shaw," said Hubert Bland, the journalist, author, and Fabian, "his costume was unmistakably, arrantly Bohemian. He wore a pair of tawny trousers, distinguished for their baggy appearance, a long cutaway coat which had once been black, but was then a

dingy green, cuffs which he was now and then compelled, cruel though it was, to trim to the quick, and a tall silk hat, which had been battered down so often that it had a thousand creases in it from top to crown. Ah, that was a wonderful hat! Shaw had to turn it around when he put it on, because it was broken in the middle, and if he wore it in the usual way it would fall limply together when removed from his head."

This was the Shaw of salad days, of novel-writing juvenility, of March-hare madness. Note the contrast in the following picture:

"When Bernard Shaw went to Paris to sit to Rodin," Alvin Langdon Coburn, the artist-photographer, recently told me, "his costume made him the cynosure of all eyes in the Parisian dining-rooms. His attire was in striking contrast to the conventional evening clothes of every one else in the room. He wore a lounge suit of golden brown, something like khaki, but of much finer texture and more pleasing shade; a solid green four-in-hand tie, and a soft *négligée* shirt, cream in color. He was a symphony in brown; and the contrast of the red beard with the soft shades of cream, brown and green made a color-scheme which, strangely though it may sound, was extremely gratifying and artistic."

In his outings in the country, Mr. Shaw frequently wears knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket, doubtless as much for convenience in cycling as for any-

thing else. He always changes his clothes for dinner—not to the evening clothes of convention, but of those of his own choice—a loose sack suit, in which he can be absolutely comfortable and at ease. His prominent position in English life to-day, and his enforced presence at many public dinners, virtually compel him, at times, to don conventional evening garb. The French Socialist leader, Jean Jaurès, an ardent advocate of peace, was once forced by public opinion to fight a duel; refusal to fight meant forfeiture of position and influence. In much the same way, Bernard Shaw has been compelled, against his will, to follow the sartorial convention of London society; but he told me that he never put on evening clothes save when he was an especially invited guest, and so was obliged to wear them on the principle “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.”

Simplicity of taste is a keynote of Mr. Shaw's character. He has meat and drink on his table for people who like that sort of thing, but he is himself a strict vegetarian and teetotaler.

“If people are cannibal enough in their tastes to want to eat the corpses of slaughtered animals, and to excite their nerves with injurious products of fermentation,” he freely says, “I shall not prevent them from committing such atrocities; but you cannot expect *me* to share in their tastes. I have no doubt that a baby's tender cheek would make a most de-

lightful steak, but I could not eat such a thing because it is personally repulsive to me."

"How did you happen to become a vegetarian?" I asked.

"Well, you see," replied Mr. Shaw, "the meals one could get at the vegetarian restaurants in the early 'eighties were not only much cheaper, but also far better, than meals at the ordinary restaurant. I recall with a shudder my own experiences as a meat-eater in the days when I cultivated literature, not on a little oatmeal, but on beef and mutton. The terrible sameness of beefsteak, roast, and mutton palled on me. Pork revolted me; rabbit was just as bad as jugged cat; and fowls were too expensive and unsubstantial a luxury. I could not afford to retain a Brillat-Savarin to devise a thousand different varieties of beef and mutton; chefs were not for such as me. I dined at a restaurant as well as I could for one and sixpence; but I grew tired of the beef and mutton, the steam and grease, the waiter looking as if he had been caught in a shower of gravy and not properly dried, the beer, the prevailing redness of nose, and the reek of the slaughter-house that convicted us all of being beasts of prey. I fled to the purer air of the vegetarian restaurants, and I have never returned to my old haunts."

Some time ago, a skilled palmist read Mr. Shaw's hand; the record of his results, while not to be regarded as infallible, is interesting as indicating cer-

tain so-called traits of Mr. Shaw's personality and temperament. The long, conical hands, quite small for so tall a man, were recognized as belonging to an author, dramatist, musician, and critic, who, in matters of opinion, jumps to conclusions on insufficient grounds. Various features of his hand showed the subject to be argumentative, dogmatic, and unconvinced; susceptible to criticism himself, yet severe in his criticism of others; quiet in temper, a curious mixture of caution and liberality. Most noticeable was the mark of "immense wealth of imagination, extreme eccentricity of ideas, and disregard of truth, all notions and opinions being colored by fancy until facts are completely lost sight of." It was predicted that the subject would make his own way in the world, and try to carry out his eccentric ideas. "He should do some very good artistic work in time to come," vouchsafed the gracious palmist, "if he will only leave the practical side of things to others, and stick to art, as he should."

It was Oscar Wilde who once said of Bernard Shaw that he had many enemies, and that none of his friends quite liked him. Truth, as Wilde maintained, is only a relative term, and this is not even a half-truth. Bernard Shaw's enemies, I believe, are generous enemies, who respect him, even while they wholly disagree with him. Those who believe in him as a genius, though they may not share his philosophy, are animated by a spirit of the finest

loyalty. Never was a man more blessed with adherents who would stand up for him in the last ditch.

Bernard Shaw is a remarkable conversationist—no mere Coleridge in monopoly of the stage, but as good a listener as a talker. He recently said, in answer to a question, that the only two subjects he cared to talk of were politics and religion. As a matter of fact, he talks volubly and unhesitatingly on any and every topic that comes to hand. His brilliancy in discussing questions with which he is familiar is equalled only by his fluency in discoursing upon themes of which he is entirely ignorant. He is prepared, at a moment's notice, to deliver an opinion on any subject under the sun, from German philosophy to women's clothes, from Richard Wagner to Anthony Comstock. His personality is so full of a bizarre charm, there is something so quaint, almost spritelike, in his manner, that it is easy to forget his opinions through absorption in what he is. And he takes a sort of diabolical delight in ingeniously pointing out how some luckless mortal has hopelessly tied up the golden threads of his discourse. In regard to a certain conversation with him, which I afterwards narrated, he said: "If I talked about the cat on Tuesday and about Shakspeare on Thursday, you came out of it with a notion that I objected to Shakspeare because he stole milk!"

This is the boyish, youthful side of Bernard



Shaw. Talk with him earnestly and sympathetically about any subject whatever—for he takes a lively interest in everything—and he will answer with equal earnestness and sympathy. He has a wide knowledge of music, art, and literature, and a wonderful insight into the heart of modern life. Talking with him, you will discover that Michelangelo has strongly influenced his artistic taste; that Mozart is his supreme ideal of the musician for musicians; that his dramas have vital points of contact with those of Molière; that William Morris opened his eyes to the efficacy of style; and that he knows his Shakspeare from beginning to end as few men know it. He wears the gay cloak of bravado before the world, and makes many a brave gesture of Cyranesque *élan*; but this is only the motley of the jester which conceals the profound seriousness of the man.

Irrepressible high spirits and abounding life are noteworthy qualities of Bernard Shaw's temperament. Yet I was deeply impressed with his tremendous, at times almost alarming, earnestness. Listen to his flashes of wit, observe the brilliant points of cleverness into which his speech is perpetually focussing, and you are likely to be led into the belief that he is merely a light *causeur*. But let mention be made of some vulgar social abuse, some crying social evil, or some damnable social crime, and his whole tone and manner undergo a remarkable transformation. A hoarse, guttural note sounds in

his voice, his eyes gleam like points of steel, and his whole being emanates protest against those classes of society which batten upon the helplessness of the poor, the credulity of the ignorant, the enforced depravity of a "submerged tenth." It is at such times that he strikes out from the shoulder with those tremendous blows of comic irony, the effect of which his opponents seek to nullify by calling them the clever quips of a fantastic Irishman, who must not under any circumstances be taken seriously.

In private life, Bernard Shaw is a rarely genial and kindly gentleman, ready to take any amount of trouble for a friend, and continually putting out his hand to help some worthy petitioner for aid or aspirant for deserved place. As one of his friends remarked the other day, "his goodness of heart, his unvarying courtesy, his tenderness toward the susceptibilities of others, and his tactful handling of shy and timorous suppliants, are things that must be experienced to be appreciated. He has a sharp nose and a barbed tongue ready for the self-seeker, the snob, the *poseur*, the smiling time-server with a dagger under his coat; but to the honest friend, proved or unproved, he shows the very soul of gentle breeding."

His playful pretence of vanity before strangers is a source of great amusement to himself and his friends. His friends know well that, at bottom, he is unaffectedly modest in respect to his own achieve-

ments. He takes criticism with the utmost equanimity, as I often found in discussing with him the details of his biography. The qualities which impressed me again and again were not affectation, but reserve; not ostentation, but simplicity. In conversation he is often complex and subtle; in homely intercourse, he is unaffectedly simple and natural.

If the germ of Shaw's philosophy can be found embodied in a single paragraph, I prefer to find it in something he recently said, exhibiting the contrast of his own optimistic theories of life with what he regards as Shakspeare's pessimistic view:

"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatsoever I can.

"I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no 'brief candle' for me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment; and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

### III

One of the most oddly significant commentaries upon the Anglo-Saxon indifference to the great ideas of the century whenever they are concretized into

the form of actable drama, is furnished by the amazing unanimity, on the part of dramatic critics in both England and America, in denying the actual existence of such an entity as the Shavian philosophy. So irreparably is the average theatrical newsman, by courtesy dubbed Dramatic Critic, divorced from the real life of philosophy, ethics, politics, and sociology; so hopelessly is his critical perception warped by the romantic conventions, senescent models, and classic traditions of the stage, so entirely does he breathe the air of box-office receipts, shine in the reflected halo of "stars," or dwell in the unreal atmosphere of stage human nature, that when the new truths of a new philosophy present themselves to his judgment, his power to recognize them as valuable or even as truths, is irretrievably lost. And if perchance the dramatist, accepting as a mere rhetorical question Horace's "*Quamquam ridentem dicere verum quid vetat?*", possesses the genius and the hardihood to embody his profoundly serious views of life in brilliantly witty and epigrammatic expression, let him beware of the penalty of being regarded as a frivolous and light-headed near-philosopher!

Stranger still, one might even venture to say almost remarkable, is the attitude of some of the leading English and American dramatic critics, who happen to be men of the world in the large sense, thoroughly cosmopolitan in spirit. Mr. Walkley is

quite willing to admit that Bernard Shaw has let in a fresh current of ideas upon the English drama; and yet, in that airy manner of his with which he brushes aside, but does not dispose of, real problems, he nonchalantly dubs those ideas the loose ends of rather questionable German philosophy. There seems little reason to doubt that Mr. Archer was quite sincere in his expressed belief that Bernard Shaw's philosophy may be picked up at any second-hand bookstall. Mr. Huneker is by no means unique in the opinion that Shaw's dramatic characters are mere mouthpieces for the ideas of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Ibsen.

It might be imagined that the verdict of Continental Europe, where so many of the most modern conceptions, most vitally fecund ideas, originate and flourish, would carry with it some weight of authority. America inaugurated Shaw's world-renown by recognizing in him a brilliant and witty personage who succeeded in entertaining the public through the adventitious medium of the stage. It was not until Shaw's plays swept from one end of Europe to the other that Shaw came to be recognized abroad as a man of ideas rather than a mere "theatre-poet"; indeed, as a genius of penetrative insight and philosophic depth. Forced by the example of America and Europe to recognize in Shaw a dramatist of Continental calibre and range, England at last accorded to Shaw, the dramatist, the acknowledgment

so long and so discredibly overdue. Nevertheless, the English dramatic critics still continued to refer Shaw's philosophy to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Strindberg, "knowing nothing about them," as Mr. Shaw once remarked to me, "except that their opinions, like mine, are not those of *The Times* or *The Spectator*."

It is no less diverting to discover in European critics an equal crassness of imagination in their judgments of Shaw's temperament, his *donnée*, and his *ausschauung*. What a chimerical picture is this painted by Régis Michaud: "Feet on the earth and head in the clouds, surrendering himself to the pleasure of discussing the most poignant problems, turning them, now this way, now that, to his gaze; confounding on every hand, to render them the more interesting, the social question and the woman question; then, suddenly, as if so much reality bore heavily upon him, after having given in his revolutionary catechism the quintessence of his paradoxes, free of all system, vanishing into Utopia—such is Bernard Shaw, the philosopher." Whilst acknowledging Shaw's precious gifts—his facile, natural and brilliant dialogue, his faculty of painting human figures in which observation and invention collaborate in equal measure—Augustin Filon lamely concludes: "Bernard Shaw would be a great dramatic author, perhaps, if only his plays were—plays!" It was left for Maurice Muret to find in Shaw a thoughtful

conservator of social and religious custom, and to pronounce *Candida* a tardy, but brilliant, revenge of the traditional ideal on the new ideal—"the victory of *la femme selon Titien* over the Scandinavian virago, this triumph of *Candida* over *Nora*"! Gaston Rageot makes the brilliant discovery that Shaw functions under the influence of Tolstoi—Tolstoi whose pet objurgation is the Superman and the Gospel of Power! The German, Heinrich Stümcke, declares that *nil admirari* is the quintessence of Shaw—Shaw, whose life is spent in ironic laughter of colossal wonderment at this entire demented, moonstruck world! The Dane, Georg Brandes, made the curiously provincial mistake of attributing to the influence of Ibsen the social discontent of Bernard Shaw who had been a vigorous Socialist propagandist for five years before he ever heard of Ibsen! Whilst the Italian, Mario Borsa, at the topmost pitch of fatuity finds a rationalist *pur et simple* in Shaw—this Shaw who persists in regarding the reign of reason as *vieux jeu*, and has declared again and again that man will always remain enslaved so long as he listens to the voice of reason!

While critics here and critics there have busied themselves, either in discovering in Shaw qualities he scorns to possess or else in indulging in elaborate analyses of his incidental traits, the two or three signal features which in themselves tend to explain his temperament, and in a word to define his art, re-

main utterly disengaged and obscure. The prime fact which stamps Shaw's art into close correspondence with life is the fundamental note of *disillusionment* which is struck fearlessly and unfailingly throughout the entire range of his work. Just as all life is an evolutionary process, and all progress follows vision clarified through the falling of the scales from the eyes of the brain, so Shaw's drama is an ordered sequence of pictured incidents in which pitfalls are uncovered, illusions unmasked, and vital secrets displayed. A profound student of human existence through actual contact with many diverse forms of life as it is actually lived to-day, and a philosopher as well, with a powerful imaginative grasp of social and sociological forms, Shaw sees that progress is possible only through the persistent discovery of mistaken conceptions of life and of society. If, as philosophers affirm, error is only imperfect knowledge, then the discovery of vital truth eventuates through that disillusioning process by which, in some psychologically crucial instance or dramatically potent conjuncture, we discover that our ideals, our conventions, our social laws and our religious conceptions are inadequate either to meet the facts or to solve the problems of life. Shaw is so deeply impressed with the predominance of human activity which consists in the pursuits of illusions that he does not hesitate to denominate it the greatest force in the world. All the more reason,



then—since the majority of men are so constituted that reality repels, while illusions attract them—that the most succinct, most crystalline, most energetic art be employed in combating this predominant and pervasive force. It is not against the optimistic and progressive illusions, those indispensable modes of cloaking reality which possess the power to awake man's helpful interest and to inspire his best efforts, that Shaw directs his batteries of irony, of satire and of wit. Dedicated to Socialism, he freely admits to be indispensable the transparent illusion of the Socialist, who always sees Labor as a martyr crucified between the two thieves of Capital, and who maintains his enthusiasm at fever-heat by the consciousness that the laborer is always a model of thrift and sobriety, while the capitalist is a tyrant, an assassin, and a scoundrel! Were Socialism compelled to stand or fall upon the strength and stability of its economic structure alone, instead of upon its illusive appeal to the passion of humanity for a cause, with the concomitant allurements of impending revolution, its fate would indubitably be sealed!

It is against those individual and social illusions, treacherous, ensnaring, destructive—prejudices, conventions, traditions, theological incrustations, social petrifications—that Shaw brings to bear all the force of his trenchant and sagacious intellect. He sees the individual involved in the social complex, and powerless, as an individual, to remedy his

lot. He sees in money the basis of modern society, and attributes the slavery of the workers and of the women to the omnipotence of capitalized wealth. Modern society represents that phase in social evolution which history will classify as the age of the exploitation of man by man. Social determinism is the most tragic fact of contemporary life; and individual liberty, in most cases, amounts to little more than a political fiction. Woman, in marriage, is still the slave of man; and romance is only the pleasing illusion which masks the relentless functioning of the Life Force. Laugh as sardonically as we may, we cannot blink the fact that Trench is powerless to resist the Sartorius Idea, that Mrs. Warren is the victim of social extremity rather than the instrument of sexual passion, that Julia is the slave of a social convention. Barbara refuses longer to be the dupe of subsidized religion; Tanner is strong-minded enough for self-contempt in the disillusioning discovery of that "vital lie," romance; and Candida clarifies the preference of "natural instinct" to "duty" as a guide to conduct. Shaw's characters, whether involved in social labyrinths or confused by conventional dogmas, break through to the light by discovering their false allegiance to some stupid current fiction or some baseless fabric of cheap romance. Gloria's armor of "Twentieth Century Education" crumples up before the simple attacks of natural impulse; Judith Anderson's larmoyant sen-

timent is dashed by the Nietzschean frankness of Dick Dudgeon; and Brassbound recoils from himself in disgust in the realization of the romantic puerility of his two-pence colored ideas of revenge. Shaw has freed himself from the illusions of patriotism and fidelity to English social forms; and he boasts that he is a "good European" in the Nietzschean sense—the true cosmopolitan in ideas. Like Maurice Barrés and Max Stirner, he is a fearless champion of the Ego; and his realism, like that of Ibsen and of Stendhal, is the realism of the disillusionist.

It is the custom of those who disagree with Shaw to point out that his brilliant and logical demonstrations of abuses and illusions, if traced back step by step to their origin, will bring us merely to some perverse idiosyncrasy of this wayward Irishman. In short, as Mr. Walkley is only too ready to indicate, Shaw is a pure *naïf*, falling into line with the more engaging *naïfs* of imaginative literature. "He is as naturally benevolent as Mr. Pickwick, and as explosively indignant in what he considers a just cause as Colonel Newcome. With Uncle Toby he conducts a whole plan of campaign on a quiet bowling green, and with Don Quixote tilts at windmills. He is as disputatious (though not so learned) as the Abbé Coignard, and when in the vein can borrow the philosophic ataraxy of Professor Bergeret." This method of disposing of Shaw on the ground

that he is a thoroughly good fellow, passionately but perversely championing futile causes which he mistakenly regards as just and right, has all the virtue of cleverness without the necessary modicum of accuracy. The solid achievements of Shaw's own career are the silent refutation of the *bons mots* of the dilettante; and his international fame rests, in chief measure, upon his generally recognized power to exhibit facts in all their stark reality. The remarkable unity of his ideas despite their superficial aspect of contrariety, his inevitable trait of applying the standard of his well-defined philosophy to all facts, stamp him as a genuine philosopher, concerned with the unities of the world rather than with its diversities. Our greatest American philosopher, William James, once said to me: "To me, Shaw's great service is the way he brings home to the *eyes*, as it were, the difference between 'convention' and 'conscience,' and the way he shows that you can *tell the truth* successfully if you will only keep benignant enough while doing it." If it be true that Shaw appears essentially simple and serious in mind and character, it is because, as Jean Blum has acutely pointed out, he has succeeded in freeing his mind from all contemporary prejudice, has acquired the illimitable receptivity of the child, and has effected the transition to that *second* state of innocence out of which proceed real art and simple truth. It is in this sense, indeed, that Shaw is a genuine *naïf*. Just as disil-

lusionment is the defining quality of his art, naïveté is the defining quality of his temperament. Far be it from me, who have revelled in many a quaint recital from his lips, to deny his oddity, his idiosyncrasy, his naïve charm. Nor would I even balk at the statement that he loves, for the sake of staggering his auditor, to proceed logically to a conclusion from a highly questionable premise. This is a quality of all highly imaginative temperaments; and in Shaw's case, is thrown into high relief by the brilliance and facility of his logical process. It is a casual fault, not a defining quality, of his art; and at the same time constitutes one of the very real charms of his personality. Some one has denominat-ed Shaw a literary Peter Pan—a boy who has never grown up in literature. This is a peculiarly pertinent characterization of one who finds an “indescribable levity—something spritelike—about the final truth of a matter”; and who once said: “It is the half-truth which is congruous, heavy, serious, and suggestive of a middle-aged or elderly philosopher. The whole truth is often the first thing that comes into the head of a fool or a child; and when a wise man forces his way to it through the many strata of his sophistications, its wanton, perverse air reassures instead of frightening him.” Shaw is a literary Peter Pan; and he takes the characterization as a very great compliment. “There was a time,” Shaw once said, “when I was a grown up man—

more grown up than anybody else. I was **about** eighteen at the time." But he added: "It was not until I became like Peter Pan that I was really worth anything."

Bernard Shaw is primarily, as I have pointed out, a disillusionizing force, achieving his purpose in great measure through the re-discovery of that state of incarnate innocence from which stem great works of art. Moreover, he frankly claims the theatre, as Zola claimed the novel, for didactic purposes; and makes so bold as to declare that the man who believes in art for art's sake is "a fool, a hopeless fool, and in a state of damnation." In his conception, art should be employed for social, political, moral and religious ends. Art is one of the greatest instrumentalities in the world for teaching people to see and hear properly. "When I write dramas," Shaw recently confessed, "what I really do is to take the events of life out of the irrelevant, and show them in their spiritual and actual relation to each other. I have to connect them by chains of reasoning, and to make bridges of feeling." When M. Charles Chassé complained that Shaw's ideas were so contradictory that he could construct no satisfactory synthesis of his philosophy, Shaw replied: "How French to wish to stick everything into pigeonholes! You find contradictions in my philosophy? Very well—are there not contradictions in life? I have expressed my ideas in groups on cer-

tain subjects in my different works. Ask no more of me." M. Firmin Roz recently declared that Shaw has ideas, but that he does not let them harden and crystallize into a system: "il les jette dans la vie où elles doivent vivre elles-mêmes comme des ferments actifs." The apparent contrariety of ideas in Shaw's works is one of the elements that tend, not only to prevent comprehension of his purpose, but even to prompt suspicion of the seriousness of his purpose. The other element springs from the popular notion that wit and seriousness are two mutually contradictory entities. The really inspired man, in Shaw's opinion, is the man who brings you to see that there are certain delusions you must surrender; that there are certain steps forward that must be taken. Progress involves not only the sacrifice of certain obligations, but also the assumption of other obligations. But let the serious reformer dare to express his ideas in witty and paradoxical form, and he must answer the charge, not simply of being disagreeable, but also of being frivolous. The Anglo-Saxon, as M. Auguste Hamon maintains, is racially incapable of intellectual virtuosity; and so is "unable to understand the finesse and the height of view of an ironical tale of Voltaire, a philosophic drama by Renan, or a novel by Anatole France." Had Shaw not given the pill of the "paper-apostle" in the jam of the "artist-magician," perhaps the public would not have endorsed his message. Shaw

has always maintained that if he had told the English people the plain truth, unvarnished and unadorned, he would have been burned at the stake. All the more reason, then, for prizing the wit, the humor, the fancy, the epigram, the paradox, of this intellectual virtuoso. Stevenson says somewhere: "No art, it may be said, was ever perfect and not many noble, that has not been mirthfully conceived."

Bernard Shaw is the most versatile and cosmopolitan genius in the drama of ideas that Great Britain has yet produced. No juster or more significant characterization can be made of this man than that he is a penetrating and astute critic of contemporary civilization. He is typical of this disquieting century—with its intellectual brilliancy, its staggering naïveté, its ironic nonsense, its devouring scepticism, its profound social and religious unrest. The relentless thinking, the large perception of the comic which stamp this man, are interpenetrated with the ironic consciousness of the twentieth century. The note of his art is capitally moralistic; and he tempers the bitterness of the disillusioning dose with the effervescent appetizer of his brilliant wit. His philosophy is the consistent integration of his empirical criticisms of modern society and its present organization, founded on authority and based upon capitalism. A true mystic, he sees in life, not the fulfilment of moral laws, or the verification of the deduc-



tions of reason, but the satisfaction of a passion in us of which we can give no account.

Evolution, in Shaw's view, is not a materialistic, but a mystical theory; and, after Lamarck and Samuel Butler, he understands evolution, not as the senseless raging of blind mechanical forces with an amazing simulation of design, but as the struggle of a creative Will or Purpose, which he calls the Life Force, toward higher forms of life. Socialism is the *alpha* and *omega* of his life. He believes in will, engineered by reason, because he sees in it the only real instrument for the achievement of Socialism. Like all pioneers in search of an El Dorado, he has found something quite different from the original object in mind. Indeed, in his search for freedom of will, he has really succeeded in discovering three checks and limitations to its operation; and he has long since abandoned the paradox of free will. For he has discovered, as first limitation, the iron law of personal responsibility to be the alternative to the golden rule of personal conduct. Second, the desirability of the sacrifice of the individual will to the realization of the general good of society through the progressive evolution of the race. And third, the personal, temperamental restriction which forbids him to accept anything as true, to take any action, to allow any free play to his will which would seriously militate

against the progressive advance of collectivism. He has achieved the remarkable distinction of embracing collectivism without sacrificing individualism, of preaching intellectual anarchy without ignoring the claims of the Collective Ego.

In Bernard Shaw rages the dæmonic, half-insensate intuition of a Blake, with his seer's faculty for inverted truism; while the close, detective cleverness of his ironic paradoxes demonstrates him to be a Becque upon whom has fallen the mantle of a Gilbert. In the limning of character, the mordantly revelative strokes of a Hogarth, shaded by the lighter pencil of a Gavarni, prove him to be a realist of satiric portraiture. The enticingly audacious insouciance of a Wilde, with his nonchalant wit and easy epigram, is united with the exquisite effrontery of a Whistler, with his devastating *jeux d'esprit* and the *ridentem dicere verum*. If Shaw is a Celtic *Molière de nos jours*, it is a Molière in whom comedy stems from the individual and tragedy from society. If Shaw is the Irish Ibsen, it is a laughing Ibsen—looking out upon a half-mad world with the riant eyes of a Heine, a Chamfort, or a Sheridan.

*The author desires to express here his thanks to the proprietors of the Deutsche Review, Illustreret Tidende, La Société Nouvelle, Bookman, Munsey's Magazine, Sewanee Review, Arena, Atlantic Monthly, Overland Monthly, North American Review, for permission to reproduce fragments of essays originally appearing in those magazines.*









# LIBRARY USE

RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED

THIS BOOK IS DUE BEFORE CLOSING TIME  
ON LAST DATE STAMPED BELOW

APR 15 1994	
	APR 22 1998

LD62-10m-2,'71  
(P2003s10)9412-A-32

General Library  
University of California  
Berkeley



U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C046794665

958

H4K

292644

*H. H. Hinson*

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

